

Hilda Denson,

Birthday of 1901.

UNDINE



UNDINE A TALE BY FRIEDRICH
BARON DE LA MOTTE FOUQUÉ TRANS-
LATED FROM THE GERMAN WITH A
CRITICAL INTRODUCTION BY EDMUND
GOSSE AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY W.
E. F. BRITTEN

La Motte-Fouqué

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LA MOTTE FOUQUE.

WHEN Heine, in full revolt against the sentimental romanticism of Prussia, was scoring the brilliant dance-music of his *Atta Troll*, he paused, half in laughter half regretfully, to speak of those dreams of youth

That I dreamed through with Chamisso,
And Brentano, and Fouqué,
In the dim blue moonlit nights

of long ago. It is interesting to note that the scattered sayings of this his great enemy by temperament really contain the fairest as well as the shrewdest criticism of La Motte Fouqué which is now to be collected out of the German writers of his age. Heine respected Fouqué, though he laughed at him; he respected his childlike candour, his gallantry, his singleness of purpose, and in his very stupidity—for

Fouqué was somewhat stupid—Heine had to confess a force which gave the old romantic cuirassier a way into the hearts of his readers to which cleverer writers, with pointed tongues in hollow cheeks, could never attain.

We, looking back to the beginning of the century, may now recognise in Fouqué the latest and the most uncompromising of the Romanticists, the man who accepted most unflinchingly the principles of that school, and who carried them out most thoroughly. “Don Quixote,” they called him, and wondered that he could venture to make his appearance two centuries after the death of his creator. To the mental vision, looking back some eighty years, Fouqué appears more as a rubicund officer of dragoons, sitting over a bivouac fire, and telling innocent fairy stories to the honour and glory of the King of Prussia. He belongs to an order of things now absolutely gone and done with, never, in all probability, to be seen again upon this world of ours. It is recorded that he thought it unbecoming to appear out of doors except in full uniform, and that no one ever saw him without a sword at his side. This was

not because of any genius he possessed for the art of war, or any special interest in strategy or defence, but largely out of a romantic love of the clanking of spurs and the prancing of handsome horses and all the panoply of a smart heroic dress. He lived through a most agitating period of German history, it is true, and he served in it with perfect courage and patriotism. But the exterior shows of the profession were his main delight, and it was not without a consciousness of the pomp of a cavalry officer that he uttered his famous dictum, so odd on the lips of a nineteenth-century poet, that "war is the only perfectly real occupation for a real man's soul and body."

The amount of literary work done by this excellent lieutenant of cuirassiers—work in poetry, in drama, in prose fiction, in journalism—was positively prodigious, and most of it, so far as modern readers are concerned, might very well have been left undone. His *Theatre* is immense and perfectly unreadable. With perhaps a solitary exception, he might just as usefully have spent his time in galloping up and down the streets of Berlin on one of his favourite chargers as in writing

these plays. Time has found a great deal to "pare away" from Fouqué's abundant fruitage. It has left four or five short romances which promise to be immortal, since the complete revolution of taste has not rendered them obsolete or uninteresting. Fouqué lives by *Sintram*, by *Der Zauberring*, and by *Thiodulf*, but most of all by *Undine*—that is to say, by the least considered of his productions from his thirty-third to his thirty-eighth year. In these stories he reveals a talent which is exquisite in its way, and quite unlike the talent of any one else, and these are the dreams on moonlit nights which filled the way-worn heart of Heine with something like the tears of memory.

Friedrich Heinrich Karl, Baron de la Motte Fouqué, was born, in the ancient city of Brandenburg, on the Havel, on the 12th of February 1777. He came from a noble and a warlike family, of ancient French extraction; his grandfather had been the friend and one of the generals of Frederick the Great, had withdrawn from the army after glorious deeds, and had been made provost of the minster of Brandenburg. The prebend's house, or *curie*, in which the

child was brought up, was old and haunted ; he loved to think it full of phantoms and spectres. With this early indulgence in romance was combined a no less precocious interest in warfare. He tells us, in the quaint and disjointed autobiography which he wrote in the third person in 1840, that he was not quite two years of age when the Bavarian war broke out, and that he was in the garden with his nurse when a friend of the house, Count Schmettau, came galloping up to bid good-bye. "He is riding off to the wars," said the nurse, and the earliest of all Fouqué's surviving memories was this of the splendid knightly officer starting away to fight the enemies of the Fatherland.

From this time forward all his dreams were of gallant deeds of arms, and all his nursery-play a long *Ritter-epos*. From his fourth to his tenth year Fouqué spent most of his time at Sacro, a country seat of his father's, where amiable tutors instructed him in the histories of Leonidas and Xerxes, the former not in Greek, but in the English of Glover's pompous epic. In 1788 the family moved again, this

time to a house at Lentzcke, near Fehrbellin, and very soon the mother of Fouqué died. The boy himself, consumed with dreams and study, seemed feeble, and on her death-bed the mother wrung from him a reluctant promise that he would not be a soldier.

Easy to make promises, it is, but hard to keep them when they cross the instinct in the blood. Very early the boy proceeded to the university of Halle, where he gaped in envious admiration at the smart Prussian hussars clanking in the street, and longed to be one of them. An extraordinary emotion was awakened in him by a visit to the collection of antiquities in the Waisenhaus in Halle, where he saw for the first time a suit of armour and a great two-handed sword. In such weapons as these had the heroes of his day-dreams gone forth to battle for Christ against false Mahound. He could scarcely believe, he tells us, that the very body of a bold fellow had once animated this cuirass, that out of this vizier a living face had peered. He touched the iron glove with rapture, fingered with awe the hilt of the huge broadsword. All the life of the future poet was

found in little in this day's first thrilling experience at Halle—the swaggering hussars in the street, the armour and weapons of dead warriors in the museum—the whole ideal of Fouqué was resumed in a combination of these two picturesque facts. For the rest of his life his aim was to make the former as pure, as gallant, and as fabulously chivalric as had been the owners of the latter, and to gaze on the combined result with adoration.

In spite of the promise to his mother, then, the vocation of Fouqué was inevitable. At the age of seventeen he became a cornet of cuirassiers in a regiment of the Duke of Weimar's ; and it was no sham soldiering, for he was immediately called upon to cross the Rhine and to fight in several engagements. Of this period of his life he gives us a lengthy, a disproportionately lengthy and sentimental account in his autobiography. Through that dim and stormy period of German history he passed an active and a happy but scarcely a significant figure. After his first campaign he went into garrison at Aschersleben, and married. This relationship, however, was a very

unlucky one, and the couple soon separated. Presently, in quarters at Weimar, we find him become a poet, a vocation which he took up from sheer ebullience of martial sentiment, hoping to become the Tyrtæus of a liberated Germany. In January 1802 he dared to apply to Goethe for a judgment on his verses, and at a picnic in Goethe's garden he was presented to Schiller. Both were markedly kind to this handsome, well-set-up young fellow; neither seems to have taken much interest in his poetry. Fouqué met Schiller again at Lauchstädt in 1803, but they did not come into close relations, and Schiller presently died.

It was friendship first with Amalie von Imhoff, and then with A. W. Schlägel and Fichte, which deepened in Fouqué the bias towards literature. He became inspired with the views and the ideas of the two latter, and Schlägel, in particular, he imitated in his earliest serious productions. At the age of twenty-seven, under the pseudonym of Pellegrin, Fouqué published at Berlin his first work, a volume of *Dramatische Spielen*, and almost immediately a second,

Romanzen vom Thale Ronceval, quite anonymously. The dramas were written in a certain emulation with Calderon, and attracted sufficient attention to encourage the young officer to put forth a whole series of a similar character. About the year 1805 Fouqué formed the acquaintance of Chamisso, of whom it was said that he became as fond as a Prussian cavalry officer could possibly become of a man who served in the infantry. He co-operated, certainly, with great activity, in the various literary enterprises of Chamisso and his associates, and their influence was strong upon the ultra-romantic poem of *Ritter Galmy*, which appeared in 1806. An even more curious resemblance than to any work of Chamisso's exists in the similarity of this epic to much in Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, which had been published the year before. Whether Fouqué had, or had not, read Sir Walter's poem, does not seem to be certain. Finally, to pass rapidly over the incidents of this opening period in Fouqué's literary career, he produced in 1808 a long and highly romantic novel on the opening of the Thirty Years' War; this was named *Alwin*,

and was the first work of Fouqué's which made him widely known. *Alwin* was welcomed and praised by Jean Paul. It showed that Fouqué had been studying the old romances of Germany, which, indeed, about this time, were his favourite reading. He felt his new chivalry deeply stimulated by these semi-mythological records of an ancient Teutonic prowess.

At this moment war broke forth again, the *Befreiungskrieg*, with all its direct and eloquent appeal to German patriotism. At first Fouqué took little or no part in actual fighting, but his enthusiasm spurred him on to increased literary activity. He wrote a vast number of ringing martial songs, and he produced the great patriotic trilogy on Sigurd, *The Hero of the North*, which, if not really a durable work, is certainly, from an historical point of view, the most interesting of his too abundant dramatic productions. The first of these three pieces, *Sigurd and the Dragon-Slayer* was published at Berlin in 1808, with, on the title-page, an engraved figure of a crested knight, in full armour, on a plunging steed, which is the very ideal of all that Fouqué himself was

and wished to be. This was followed in due course by *Sigurd's Revenge* and by *Aslauga*. Heine's account of the hero is entertaining; Sigurd, he declared, is "as strong as the rocks of Norway and as impetuous as the ocean that dashes upon them, he is as brave as a hundred lions, and has as much sense as two donkeys." But in a soberer moment Heine confessed that he found "great beauties" in the drama, which was favourably affected by the style of the great Danish playwright Öhlenschläger, now at the height of his career.

Recent German critics, and in particular Max Koch in his valuable study on Fouqué, have pointed out that in this Scandinavian trilogy he is vaguely and dimly, but unquestionably, leading the way for Wagner. At this time Fouqué was full of the *Nibelungenlied*, and in order to illustrate it more completely was reading Icelandic, Danish, and Swedish authorities with great assiduity. Nor did he stop here; he made this but the starting-point for the composition of other dramas, full of magnificent Teuton heroes who foreshadowed the greatness of

Germany and her unbroken spirit. In these plays it seems almost certain that his zeal and fire were not equalled by his executive ability. He had little power of dramatic evolution, and no insight into character. The heroes ride through his dramas on very handsome steeds and in admirable armour, but we get little notion of their personal quality.

Absorbed by public events, and strongly pre-occupied, too, by other branches of his own literary activity, Fouqué passes in his autobiography very hurriedly over the successive composition, at this time, of his four most famous tales. He evidently regarded them, as Hans Christian Andersen regarded his fairy stories, as trifling affairs, a little below his dignity, bagatelles the extreme popularity of which rather vexed than pleased him. Fouqué was now publishing a quarterly magazine for romantic literature, called *Die Jahreszeiten*, and in this appeared *Undine* in 1811, and a little later *Sintram*. The *Zauberring* was also finished, though not published, in 1811, and in 1815 appeared *Thiodulf*. These exquisite stories, then, belong to the great period of war and agitation, when

the physical and mental powers of Fouqué were strung up into their very highest tension. In 1812 he led a body of volunteers, in aid of the King of Prussia, towards the relief of Breslau. In the battles of Lützen and of Bautzen he was wounded, in the course of the former being hurled from his horse into the water, and not being saved until the cold had produced a serious effect upon his constitution. He was told by the doctors that the excitement and exposure of another campaign would probably be fatal to him, and he unwillingly withdrew from active service. But the victorious issue of this campaign was a matter of infinite delight to Fouqué: he calls it the *jubelcentrum* of his life, the point to which in advanced years he looked back with the greatest ecstasy.

The remainder of Fouqué's life is not of very great interest to the English reader of *Undine*. He wrote a great many martial songs, "sweet lyrical humming-birds" Heine, half graciously half sarcastically, called them. The most striking of them are contained in a little volume, called *Poems before and during the Campaign of 1813*, published at Berlin

in 1814. Some of these, like the verses written on the battle-field of Görschen, and beginning

Wer reitet so frisch und singt so hell
 Dem rühmlichen Kampf entgegen ?
 Die Krieger die kenn' ich als keck und schnell,
 Vor keinem Feind noch erlegen ;
 Das ist meine reitende Jägerschar,
 Die so kühn und freudig bei Görschen war,

have, in addition to the gallant lilt of the measure, a happy directness and simplicity of phrase. Fouqué's second wife, to whom he was deeply devoted, died in 1831; he married again, however, and this time the novelist Albertine Tode, who bore him two sons, and who survived him. Fouqué fell into obscurity and disfavour, but the accession of Friedrich Wilhelm IV., in 1840, promised well for his fortunes. He did not long, however, enjoy the patronage of a romantic monarch who doated on his writings. Fouqué died very suddenly, and without any premonitory symptoms of disease, on the 23rd of January 1843.

All that Fouqué directly tells us about the inception of *Undine* is that the form of the story was

suggested to him by a passage in Theophrastus Paracelsus. But Goethe had already personified the four primary elements as Salamander, Undine, Sylphe, and Kobold. The tale of Fouqué is, therefore, a realisation of the second of these, the element of water, and its relations with the myths of Melusine and of Lohengrin have been pointed out by the German critics. That Fouqué's *Undine* was the book which Richard Wagner was reading on the latest evening of his life has often been recorded, and shows the sympathy of the great musician for his romantic predecessor.

The success which *Undine* met with from the moment of its publication was extraordinary. Goethe, who found little to commend in the other writings of Fouqué, praised this warmly to Eckermann and to Holtei. He said that poor Fouqué had on this one occasion struck pure gold, and his only misfortune was that all the rest of his life he could not understand why people did not take his ordinary copper for the same gold. Heine, always so penetrating in the independence of his criticism, became entirely enthusi-

astic about this one work of Fouqué's, and called *Undine* a "wonderfully lovely poem. It is a very kiss; the Genius of Poesy kissed the sleeping Spring, and he opened his eyelids with a smile, and all the roses breathed out perfume, and all the nightingales sang—this is what our excellent Fouqué clothed in words and called *Undine*." The tale went on increasing the circle of its admirers, and before Fouqué died he had received it in English, French, Italian, and Russian translations.

It was from Novalis that Fouqué received the idea of a Christendom united and vivified by a fresh age of chivalry. This was a familiar aspiration among the later German romanticists, but with most of them it brought with it a tendency to Catholicism, and that of a strongly marked order. Fouqué's peculiarity was to combine his military chivalry with the sternest Protestantism. One special characteristic of his is the unselfish and even quixotic devotion to woman which he inculcates, often very sweetly and gracefully. He was, in fact, a gallant but puritanical Berlin cavalry-officer, tintured with the peculiar chevalieresque sentiment

of the close of the eighteenth century, and penetrated with a sentiment of his divine mission. Friends, like Perthes, privately found him narrow and tiresome, and complained that to be a pleasant companion one should sometimes be a grown-up human being, and not invariably a combination of poet, child, and man-in-armour. Where as a writer he was most successful was in those tales in which he was the natural successor of the author of *Amadis de Gaule*, and of the French writers of sentimental heroic romance in the seventeenth century. No element of humour, no smallest suspicion of the ridiculous, interfered with his perfect contentment in the composition of tales in which men and women of heroic mould, magnificently habited, were gently interfered with by supernatural beings and elemental influences. These stories were often instinct with beauty, and, of them all, *Undine* is certainly the most delightful.

EDMUND GOSSE.

UNDINE

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CHAPTER I

HOW THE KNIGHT CAME TO THE FISHERMAN

HUNDREDS of years ago, one beautiful evening, a good old man, who was a fisherman, was sitting at his door and was mending his nets. He lived, you must know, at a very charming spot. The green turf on which his cottage was built stretched far out into a great lake, and, while it seemed that this tongue of land must have been drawn forth by love of the clear blue, brilliant water, so also it might be thought that the lake too had grasped at the lovely meadow with an amorous arm, at its tall tremulous grasses, and at the refreshing shadows of its trees. Each went as a guest to the other, and that was the very reason why

each was so beautiful. Save the fisherman and his family, however, few or no human beings were ever to be met with in this lovely place. For behind the tongue of land there lay a very wild forest, so dark and so impassable, so full of weird creatures and strange apparitions, that most folks must be driven by great necessity before they would adventure within it. The aged, pious fisherman, however, would cross it again and again with a light heart, when he had occasion to carry the fine fish which he caught from his lovely tongue of land to a certain great city which lay not far behind the great forest. It was, moreover, made easy for him to pass through the woodland, because he harboured none but pious thoughts, and because it was his habit, whenever the evil shadows clustered round him, to break out into singing of a holy psalm with clear throat and upright heart.

So, as he sat this evening, quite innocently by his nets, it was with unpremeditated alarm that he caught in the darkness of the forest the rustling sound as of a man on horseback, and heard this noise come ever nearer to the tongue of land. All that on many a

stormy night he had dreamed of the secrets of the forest came back to him now, and above all the image of a snow-white man, of gigantic stature, who never ceased to nod in a horrible way with his head. Ah! as he lifted his eyes to the forest, it seemed to him that even at this moment, through the screen of foliage, he saw the nodding man advancing. However, he soon pulled himself together, reminding himself that never in the forest had he met with any adventure, and that, in any case, on the green tongue of land the evil spirit, doubtless, would have less power over him. At the same time, in a loud voice, and out of his heart, he repeated, as in prayer, a text of Scripture, whereupon his courage returned to him, and, almost smiling, he perceived into what strange error he had fallen. The white, nodding man had suddenly become a little brook, long familiar to him, which came foaming out of the forest and poured its waters into the lake. But what had caused the rustling sound was a handsome knight, richly adorned, who now came riding on horseback towards the cottage, through the shadows of the trees. A

mantle of scarlet hung down over his violet-blue doublet, embroidered with gold; out of his gold-coloured cap sprang plumes of red and of violet blue; in his golden baldric blazed an extremely beautiful and richly damasked sword. The white charger which carried the knight was slighter of build than is common among steeds of war, and stepped so lightly over the greensward that his hoofs seemed to leave no impression on this delicate carpet of verdure. Not yet, however, had the aged fisherman wholly taken heart again, although he thought that he perceived that from one of so noble a mien no evil dealing was to be dreaded; so that he very modestly greeted the seigneur as he approached, and remained standing by his nets. Then the knight stopped still, and asked whether he and his horse might be sheltered and tended there that night.

“As far as your horse is concerned, dear sir,” replied the fisherman, “I know of no better stable to guide him to than this sheltered meadow, and no better fodder than the grass that grows thereon. But I will gladly entertain yourself with supper

and a bed, the best that my poor little house can offer."

The knight was well content with this reply. He dismounted from his steed, whom they jointly ungirthed and unbridled, and then he let him wander at will on the flowery pasture, saying to his host :—

"Had I found you less hospitable and less genial, my dear old fisherman, yet would you not to-day have been free of my presence, since, as I perceive, before us lies a broad lake, and the dear God preserve me from having to ride back again at shut of eve through that strange woodland of yours."

"We will not so much as speak of it," said the fisherman, and with that he led his guest into the cottage.

There, by the hearth, from which a scanty fire lighted up the clean twilit room, the fisherman's aged wife was sitting in a large chair. When this distinguished guest entered, she rose to her feet with an amiable gesture of welcome, but sank again into her seat of honour, without offering it to the

stranger. Upon which the fisherman said, with a smile :—

“Take it not ill, young sir, that she has not given up to you the most comfortable chair in the house : such is the way among poor folks—it is the exclusive right of age to keep ‘the best place.’ ”

“Eh, husband,” said the wife with a quiet smile, “what are you thinking of? Our guest belongs to the family of Christ, and how should dear young blood dream of hunting old folks out of their places? Be seated, my young sir,” she went on, turning to the knight; “yonder stands a very nice little chair, only you must not fidget about upon it too much, for one of its legs is not so strong as it once was.”

The knight took hold of the stool with care, and sat down pleasantly upon it. It seemed to him as though he became one of this little household, and even as though, from some far journey, he had come back home to it.

Then these three good folk began, in all friendly familiarity, to chat to one another. Of the forest, a subject to which the knight again and again returned,

the old man would not confess that he knew much. He considered, at least, that nightfall was no time for such talk. But of their manner of keeping house and of their doings the old couple were ready enough to talk, and glad too to listen when the knight told them of his travels, and that he had a castle at the source of the Danube, and that Lord Huldbrand of Ringstetten was his name. While this talk was going on, now and again the stranger noticed a noise at the bottom of the little window, as though some one were splashing water at it. The old man knitted his brows whenever he heard this sound, but when at length a whole stream gushed against the pane, and through the ill-fitting window-frame spluttered into the room, he rose indignantly, and in a menacing voice cried out through the window—

“Undine! Have done with these childish tricks. Don’t you know that a strange gentleman is here with us in the cottage?”

Then there was silence outside, save that a little noise of tittering could be perceived, and the fisherman said, returning:—

“I am afraid you will have to excuse her, my honoured guest, for this and perhaps for other instances of bad behaviour, but she means no harm by it. I must explain that she is our foster-daughter Undine, and that she cannot cure herself of these childish ways, although she has already reached her eighteenth year. However, as I was saying, she is a very good girl at heart.”

“Ah! you may say so,” broke in the old woman, shaking her head. “When you come home from catching fish or from an excursion, you think that her little gambols are vastly pretty. But to have them going on all day long, and never a word of sense, and, as she grows up and ought to be a help in the house, only to have to be always taking pains to prevent her tricks from being the ruin of us—that is quite another affair, and it would try the patience of a saint.”

“Well, well!” smiled the good man, “your trial is Undine, and mine is the lake. Though it often breaks through my wears and my nets, yet am I very fond of it, and you, with all your worry

and anxiety love this pretty child of ours. Is it not true?"

"One cannot contrive to be very cross with her," acknowledged the old woman, with a smile.

The door then flew open, and a fair child of marvellous beauty slipped in, laughing, and said:—

"You were only joking, father? Where is this guest of yours?"

But at the same moment she perceived the knight, and stopped to gaze in wonder at the handsome youth. Huldbrand feasted his eyes on the lovely vision, and tried to form a clear impression of her charming features, for he thought that it was her surprise alone which gave him the time to do so, and that in another moment she would disappear in a freak of bashfulness. But it was not so. For when she had gazed upon him for quite a long time, she came confidently nearer, kneeled down before him, and said, playing the while with a token of gold which hung by a rich chain on his breast:—

"Oh, you beautiful, you gentle guest, how is it that you have come at last into our poor cottage? For

years and years you must have wandered round the world before you found us! Is it from the wild woodland that you come, O beautiful friend?"

The old woman, reproving her, left him no time for reply. She desired her to stand up, like a modest girl, and to be about her work. Without answering her, however, Undine brought a little footstool close to Huldbrand's seat, sat down upon it with her sewing, and said in a pleasant tone of voice :—

"I will do my work here."

The old man did what parents usually do with spoiled children: he pretended not to have noticed Undine's disobedience, and began to talk of something else. But the girl would not allow that. She said :—

"I have asked our dear guest whence he comes, and he has not answered."

"Out of the forest I come, you lovely little vision," replied Huldbrand; and she continued :—

"Then you must tell me how you came to enter the forest, for most folk dread to go there, and you must recount what strange adventures befell you in it, for none pass through it without adventures."

Huldbrand was conscious of a little shudder at this reminder, and involuntarily he glanced at the window, for he fancied that one of the horrible shapes that had met him in the forest might be grinning in at him. But he saw nothing, save the deep black night, that had by now closed up the window-pane. Then he drew himself together, and was going to begin the story of his adventures, when the old man interrupted him with these words :—

“Not so, Sir Knight ! This is no hour to tell such tales as these.”

But Undine leaped in anger from her stool, set her beautiful arms akimbo, and shouted out, standing right in front of the fisherman :—

“He is not to tell his story, father ? He is not ? But I choose that he shall do so ! And do so he shall ! ”

And thereupon, with her pretty little foot, she stamped upon the ground, but all with a pose so droll and graceful that Huldbrand could almost be less persuaded to take his eyes off her now she was angry than a while ago when she was so gentle. But the

disapproval which had been smouldering in the old man now broke out in flame. He loudly reproved Undine for her disobedience and her rude behaviour in the presence of the visitor; and the good old wife joined in. Then Undine said :—

“ If you are going to scold me, and do nothing as I wish it done, then sleep by yourselves in your smoky old cottage ! ”

And like an arrow she shot out of the door and vanished into the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER II

HOW UNDINE HAD COME TO THE FISHERMAN

HULDBRAND and the fisherman leaped from their seats and prepared to pursue the angry girl. But before they reached the door of the cottage Undine had already long disappeared into the misty darkness outside, and no sound of her light footsteps betrayed the direction in which she had taken flight. HuldbRAND looked inquiringly at his host. He was almost persuaded that the exquisite vision, which had so suddenly melted into the night, could be none other than a continuation of the strange apparitions which, earlier in the day, had made their wanton sport with him in the forest; but the old man muttered in his beard that it was not the first time that she had tricked them thus. But it meant an aching heart and

sleepless eyes all the night long, for who could tell what harm might not befall her, out there in the darkness alone until the dawn ?

“Then, in God’s name, my father,” said Huldbrand in an agony, “let us go after her !”

The old man answered, “And whither ? It would be a crime in me to let you pursue this mad maiden alone in darkness and in solitude, and my aged limbs could not overtake the hoyden, even if one knew whither she had betaken herself.”

“But, at all events, we must shout after her, and beg her to return,” said Huldbrand, and with that he began to call as loudly as he could, “Undine ! Oh, Undine ! Do come back !”

The old man shook his head ; he told the knight that there was no use in calling, and that he did not realise yet how froward the child was. But for all that he could not help shouting and shouting through the blackness of the night, “Undine ! Ah ! dear Undine ! I beg of you, only once more, come back to us !”

But it befell, as the fisherman had said it would,

no Undine could be seen or heard, and as the old man absolutely refused to allow Huldbrand to attempt to follow the fugitive they were at last obliged to go back into the cottage. They found the fire there on the hearth almost extinguished, and the good-wife, who seemed to regard the flight and peril of Undine by no means so seriously as her husband did, was already gone to bed. The old man drew the embers together, laid dry wood upon them, and by the light of the reviving flames discovered a tankard with wine in it, which he set between himself and his guest.

“You are still anxious about that tiresome girl, Sir Knight, and we may as well steal away a part of the night in gossiping and drinking as toss on our reed-mats in the vain pursuit of sleep. Is it not so?”

Huldbrand was easily persuaded, and, as the house-wife had now gone to rest, the fisherman placed him in her empty seat of honour. The men chatted and drank in the temper natural to two brave and honest fellows. To be sure, every time there

was the least sound outside the window, and even sometimes when there was no sound at all, they would glance up, both of them, and say, "She's coming!"

Then they would be perfectly still for a moment or two, and then, finding that nothing happened, after shaking their heads and sighing, they would go on talking as before.

But as neither of them, really, could settle his thoughts to any other subject than Undine, the most natural thing seemed to be for the knight to listen to how Undine in the first instance came to the fisherman, and for the old fisherman to tell that tale. And this was the way he told it:—

"Fifteen years and more have gone by since, once upon a time, I was travelling through the forest with my wares, bound for the city. My wife had stayed at home, as usual; and at that time there was another and a fair cause why she should, for God had been gracious enough at our somewhat advanced age to bestow upon us a little child of wonderful beauty. It was a little maiden, and we

were just discussing whether, for the benefit of this new visitor, we ought not to abandon our lovely tongue of land, and to transfer God's dear gift to some place where she might the better thrive. But poor folks cannot act so freely as you, Sir Knight, might fancy; nay, by the dear God, one can but do what one can. Well, this matter kept running in my head, and as I passed through the roar and rattle of the city, and thought of this tongue of land that was so dear to me, I kept repeating, 'This is the riot in the midst of which my next home will have to be made, or, at least, in some place not much less noisy.' Nevertheless, I murmured not against the ways of God, but the more raised up my heart to Him in silent thankfulness for the new-born babe. I should, too, be telling a lie if I were to say that, either in going or in returning through the forest, anything more remarkable than usual happened to me, for I have never seen anything uncanny there. The Lord was ever with me through the strange shadows."

So saying, he lifted his cap from his bald

head, and remained awhile buried in thoughts of prayer. Then he covered his brows again, and went on :

“It was on this side of the forest, ay, upon this side, that sorrow came to meet me. My wife came with her eyes streaming like two waterfalls; she had put on mourning garments.

“‘Oh, dear God,’ I moaned, ‘where is our beloved child? Tell me!’

“‘With Him on whose name you are calling, dear husband,’ she answered, and silently weeping we passed together into the cottage. I searched for the little body, and then I learned what had happened. My wife had been sitting by the shore of the lake with the child, and as she played with it without a care or thought, suddenly the little thing bent forward, just as though she saw some lovely object in the water; my wife saw her laughing, the sweet angel, and grasping with her little hand; but next moment, with a sudden movement, she had leaped out of her arms and into the mirror of the lake. I searched and searched for the little dead body, but



WET Brillen

nothing was to be seen, and no trace of her was ever found.

“ Well, the same evening, we two desolate parents were sitting silently in the cottage; we had no wish to talk, even if we could have done so for our tears. We sat gazing into the flame upon the hearth. Then there came a noise of something rattling at the door: it opened, and a marvellously lovely little maid of three or four years of age stood, in a rich dress, on the threshold, and smiled at us. We were stricken quite dumb with astonishment, and at first I could not be sure whether it was a real little human being or merely a delusive vision. Then I perceived that water was dripping from the golden hair and the rich raiment, and saw that the lovely child had fallen into the water, and needed help.

“ ‘ Wife,’ I said, ‘ no one could have saved our dear child; but at least we will do to others what it would have made us blessed upon earth if others could have done to us.’

“ We took the child in, put her to bed, and gave her heating drink. All this while she said not a word,

and merely gazed steadily at us out of the sea-blue twin heavens of her eyes. Next morning it proved that she had caught no chill, and I asked her who her parents were and whence she came to us. But she told a strange, bewildered story. She had come from some distant place, for, during the fifteen years that have since elapsed, not a trace of her past life have I been able to discover. Besides, every now and then she talks of things so extraordinary that sometimes you would fancy she must have fallen from the moon. She prattles about golden castles, with crystal roofs, and God knows what else. But the clearest part of her story used to be that with her mother she had gone out upon the great lake, and had fallen overboard out of the boat, and remembered nothing more till she found herself under the trees, and felt quite happy on the pleasant shore.

“But now great hesitation and anxiety invaded our hearts. That we should keep the new-found child in the place of the darling who had been drowned was very easily decided. But who could tell whether the little one had been baptised or not? She herself could

throw no light on the question. That she was a being created for the glory and joy of God, that indeed she knew, and told us so over and over again, and she was ready to let us do with her whatever should be for the glory and joy of God. This is how my wife and I reasoned about the matter. If she has never been baptised, then why should we delay to do it? but if she has, there is more harm in too little than in too much of a good thing. And then we set about searching for a good name for the child, since as yet we knew not really how to address her. At last we determined that Dorothea was the name to suit her best, since I once heard tell that that name means God's gift, and truly God had sent her as a gift to us, to comfort us in our sorrow. But she would not hear of it, and she insisted that Undine was what her parents had called her, and that Undine should continue to be her name. Now that seemed to me to be a heathenish name, that is to be found in no list of saints' days, and so I went and consulted a priest in the city. He would not hear of such a name as Undine, and when I had begged him many times

to do so he consented to come with me through the dreadful forest and christen the child here in my cottage. She stood so prettily dressed, and with so sweet an expression, that the priest's whole heart went out to her, and she contrived so cleverly to flatter him, and at the same time so roguishly to defy him, that one by one he forgot all the good reasons that he had raised against the name Undine. So the end of it was that she was baptised Undine, and all through the holy office behaved in a way that was extraordinarily good and gentle, wild and fickle though she usually was. For my wife was right, we have terrible things to put up with! If I were only to you——”

But here the knight interrupted the fisherman, to draw his attention to a sound, as of a roaring stream of waters, which he had perceived for some time past while the old man was talking, and which now seemed to be close outside the window of the cottage. Both leaped to the door. There they saw, by the light of the newly risen moon, that the rivulet which ran down out of the forest had far outstepped its

banks, and was carrying down with it stones and logs of wood in its whirling eddies. The storm broke, as if awakened by the roar of it, out of the huge clouds which hurried along across the face of the moon ; the lake was howling under the lashing wings of the wind ; the trees on the tongue of land were moaning from their root to their topmost twig, and bowed as if the whirling waters made them giddy.

“ Undine ! Undine ! for the love of God, Undine ! ” shouted the two men in their anxiety. But no answer came there back to them, and all distracted they rushed forth from the cottage, the one in this direction and the other in that.

CHAPTER III

HOW THEY FOUND UNDINE

HULDBRAND became more and more anxious and distressed, the longer they were searching, and searching all in vain, under the shadow of the night. The thought that Undine might after all be no more than a mere apparition of the forest came over him with fresh force ; indeed, as the waves and the winds kept howling, as the trees crashed, the whole tongue of land, lately so pleasant in its sense of repose, and the cottage, and its inhabitants, all seemed a mere mocking illusion, deceptive to the senses. Yet, at a distance, he could still hear the anxious voice of the fisherman, crying to Undine, the loud prayers and hymns of the old house-wife sounding through the roar of the elements. At last he came close to the

banks of the swollen torrent, and saw in the moonlight that it had come rushing down across the edge of the monstrous forest in such a way as to turn the point of land into an island.

“Dear God,” he thought to himself, “what if Undine should have ventured ever so short a distance into the fearful woodland—perhaps in her charming waywardness, just because I would not tell her what I had seen there—and then the torrent have swept between us, and she, perhaps, at this very moment, be weeping there among the phantoms !” A scream of horror escaped him, and he climbed across the intervening stones and torn-up pine-trees, that he might reach the rushing stream, and, wading or swimming, might search beyond it for the fugitive. There came back to him in memory all the terrible and wonderful things that had befallen him by daylight under the boughs that now were murmuring and howling. In particular, it seemed to him that a tall white man, whose figure he recognised all too well, was grinning and nodding at him on the farther bank ; yet even these horrid visions led him the more passionately onward,

for he told himself that it was beneath their gloom that Undine now was lying, alone, in the shadow of death.

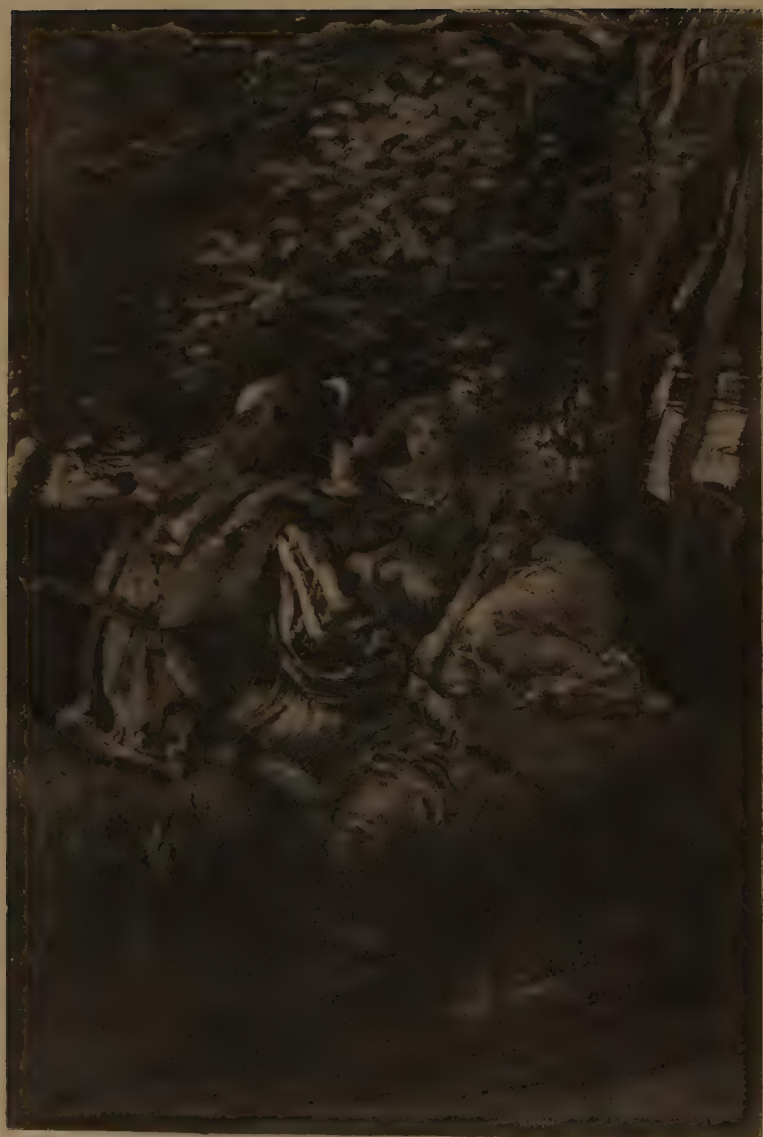
He had already seized a sturdy pine-branch, and was standing, supported by it, in the whirling torrent, against which he could scarcely hold his way, but into which he was boldly pushing forwards, when a sweet voice rang out close to him, "Take care! take care! The old stream is spiteful!"

He recognised these beloved sounds; he paused as if dazed under the shadows which had now obscured the moon, and at the same moment the water rose to his thighs. But he would not turn back.

"If you are not really there, and if only, like a will-o'-the-wisp, your shade is dancing round me, then I too choose to live no longer, but will be a shade as you are—oh, my dear, dear Undine."

These words he shouted and pushed still farther into the torrent.

"Look round—ah! look round, you handsome, infatuated youth!" called a voice close beside him, and, glancing sideways, he saw, by the light of the moon, which was now clear again, under the boughs



of the tall, interlacing trees, on a little island formed by the flood, Undine, who was smiling and prettily crouching in the flowery grass.

Ah! how much more gaily now than before the young man wielded his pine-branch as a staff! A few steps carried him through the torrent which raged between him and the maiden, and then he was standing beside her on the little plot of turf so genially and so securely overshadowed by the ancient trees. Undine now had raised herself a little, and underneath her tent of leafage she wound her arms about his neck, until she drew him down beside her on the yielding grass.

“Here you shall tell me your story, my charming friend,” she said, whispering lightly; “here those disagreeable old folks cannot listen to what we say. And surely this our roof of foliage is quite as good as their wretched cottage?”

“It is heaven itself!” said Huldbrand, and, kissing the lovely flattering creature, he pressed her to his heart.

But by this time the old fisherman had reached

the bank of the torrent, and shouted across to the two young people :—

“Ah, Sir Knight! I treated you as one honest fellow treats another, and there you are amusing yourself with my foster-child, and letting me run up and down in the darkness, half crazy with anxiety.”

“I have only just found her myself, old father,” shouted back the knight.

“So much the better,” said the fisherman; “but now, without any more delay, bring her over here to me to firm land.”

But of that Undine would not hear. She thought it would be merrier to pass right within the wild woodland with the handsome stranger than to go back to the cottage, where no one would do what she wished, and whence the fair knight himself sooner or later must take his departure. Throwing her arms round Huldbrand, she sang with an indescribable charm :—

The stream danced down through copse and brake
To seek a happy shore ;
It reached at last the boundless lake,
And dances now no more.

The old fisherman wept bitterly at this her song, but she seemed scarcely moved by his tears. She kissed and cajoled her favourite, who said to her at last:—

“Undine, if that old man’s grief does not touch your heart, it touches mine. We must go back to him.”

Her great blue eyes gazed at him in astonishment, and then at last she said, slowly and falteringly:—

“If you think we must—well! Whatever you think right is right for me. But first of all that old man up there must promise that he will not try to prevent you from telling me what you saw in the forest, and—that’s all I care about.”

“Come, then, come!” shouted the fisherman to her. “Come without wasting more words out here.”

At the same time he stretched his arms far out towards her over the torrent, and nodded with his head, as much as to say that he agreed to her con-

ditions. At this his white locks fell in a strange confusion over his face, and Huldbrand could not but be reminded of the nodding white man in the woodland. But, without troubling about that, the young knight grasped Undine in his arms and bore her across the little space of waters flowing between their islet and firm ground. The old man fell upon Undine's neck, and could not have done with kissing and petting her, and the old wife came too, and she embraced the prodigal most affectionately. Not another word of reproof was uttered, and the less because Undine, forgetting all her naughtiness, almost overwhelmed the two foster-parents with kind words and caresses.

But while the delights of repossession were still filling their hearts, the dawn began to glimmer over the lake; the storm had by this time worn itself out, and the little birds were singing lustily on the wet branches. And as Undine still insisted that the knight should keep his promise and should tell his tale, the old folks, smiling and assenting, yielded to

her wish. Breakfast was spread under the trees which stood close to the lake, behind the cottage, and they sat down to it with a light heart—Undine on the grass at the feet of the knight, for she would sit nowhere else. And then Huldbrand began to speak as follows :—

CHAPTER IV

OF WHAT BEFELL THE KNIGHT IN THE FOREST

“IT must be some eight days since I rode into that free city of the Empire which lies out there beyond the forest. I had scarce arrived when there was a fair gathering for the tourney and running at the ring, wherein I spared neither my steed nor my lance. One day, as I was standing quietly at the lists, resting after that sprightly toil, and was handing my helmet back to one of my squires, I suddenly perceived the figure of an exquisite woman who stood in magnificent attire on one of the balconies and gazed at me. I asked my neighbour who she was, and was told that the lovely maiden’s name was Bertalda, and that she was the foster-daughter of one of the great dukes who live in these parts. I noticed that she continued

to look steadily at me, and, as is the mode with us young knights, if I had ridden smartly before, now I put all my heart into my play. At the ball that evening it chanced that I was Bertalda's partner, and so it continued as long as the festival lasted."

At this moment a sharp pain in his left hand, which happened to be hanging down, interrupted Huldbrand's narrative. He turned to look at the place where he was hurt. Undine had set her pearly teeth hard in his finger, and looked thoroughly angry and spiteful. But in another instant she was gazing affectionately up into his eyes, and was softly whispering—

"It is your own fault!"

Then she hid her face, and the knight, much astonished and a little embarrassed, continued his story:—

"This Bertalda is a proud, strange girl. On the second day she did not attract me so much as on the day before, and on the third day she pleased me still less. But I kept with her, because she was more friendly to me than to any other knight, and

at length in jest I prayed her for one of her gloves.

“‘When you bring me news, having been there quite alone, of what our famous forest looks like, I will give you one,’ she said.

“I cared not much to gain her glove, but a word is a word, and no honourable knight will let himself be called on twice to undertake such an adventure.”

“I think she loved you,” Undine interrupted.

“It did look like it,” admitted Huldbrand.

“Well,” cried the maiden, laughing, “she must be a fool to send away the man she loves. And into a dangerous forest, too! I would have let the forest keep its secret long enough before I did so.”

“It was yesterday morning that I started,” continued the knight, smiling kindly at Undine. “The stems of the trees looked so red and slim in the morning light, the green turf was so brilliant in it, the leaves were whispering so gaily to one another, that in my heart I laughed at the folks who could imagine that anything uncanny would happen in so sweet a place. We shall soon have trotted through this woodland

and back again, I said to myself in a merry mood, and before I had given it another thought I was deep in the green shadows, and could see no more of the open country that lay behind me. Then for the first time it occurred to me that I might very well go astray in the mighty forest, and that this perhaps was the one danger that threatened a man who crossed it. I paused, therefore, and looked round to see the position of the sun, which had meanwhile risen somewhat higher. As I did so I became aware of a black object on the bough of a lofty oak-tree. I thought it was a bear, and I was feeling for my blade, when it said, with a human voice, but in a very rough and hateful way :—

“‘If I did not nibble off the twigs up here, where would you be roasted at midnight to-night, Mr. Impudence?’

“And then it grinned and made such a rustling in the branches that my steed grew restive and galloped away with me, before I had time really to see what kind of a devil’s beast it was.”

“Oh, don’t say that,” said the old fisherman, and

crossed himself; the house-wife did the same in silence. Undine looked at her beloved with bright eyes, and said, "The best of the story is that they have not really roasted him. Go on, you lovely youth!"

The knight continued his narrative:—

"My frightened horse carried me swiftly past stems of trees and branches; it was wet with fright and heat, and still could not be prevailed upon to stop. At last it made straight for a chasm in the rocks. Then it suddenly seemed to me that a tall white man threw himself in front of the maddened steed, and so startled it that it stood still. I mastered it again, and then for the first time I perceived that what had saved me was no white man, but the silvery brightness of a cascade, pouring down from a hillside in such a way that my horse's path was crossed and hemmed in by it."

"Thanks, dear cascade!" cried Undine, clapping her hands together. But the old man, shaking his head, looked down moodily in front of him.

"I had scarcely set myself straight again in the saddle, and got proper hold of the reins," Huldbrand

continued, "when there rose up at my side a strange little man, dwarf, and ugly beyond measure, all brownish yellow, and with a nose that was no smaller than the rest of him put together. He grinned with a smile of idiotic politeness on his broad slit of a mouth, and made a thousand scrapes and bows at me. As this buffoonery displeased me very much, I thanked him quite curtly, turned round my still trembling steed, and thought that I would undertake some other adventure, or, if I found none, that I would make my way home, since during my wild ride the sun had passed the meridian and was now sinking to the west. But suddenly, with a turn like a flash of lightning, the little fellow was standing again in front of my horse.

"'Out of that!' I said fretfully. 'The brute is fresh, and may easily knock you over.'

"'Ah!' snarled the dwarf, and laughed more like an idiot than ever. 'Give me some money, for I stopped your little horse; if it had not been for me, you and your little horse would be sprawling down there in the chasm. Hu!'

“ ‘Don’t make any more faces at me, and take your money, liar that you are, for, look you, it was the good-natured waterfall there that saved me, not you, you pitiful little sprite!’ And so saying I let a piece of gold drop into his queer cap, which he was holding out at me like a beggar. Then I pushed on; but he screamed behind me, and was suddenly running at my side with a speed that was incredible. I put my horse to a gallop; but he galloped beside us, hard work as it must have been for him, and all his body seemed out of joint in strange dislocations, half ludicrous, half hideous. All the time he held my gold coin high in the air, and with every leap he made in galloping he shrieked: ‘Base money! base coin! base coin! base money!’ and yelled it out so from his hollow chest that you would have thought at each scream he must have fallen dead. And his hideous red tongue lolled far out of his throat. I stopped in agitation; I asked him what he meant by screaming so. ‘Take another piece of gold,’ I said: ‘take two, but get you gone.’

“Then again he began his ugly, civil reverences,

and snarled: 'But not gold, it shall not be gold, my little gentleman; I have but too much of that trash of my own; wait, till I show you.'

"And then it suddenly seemed to me that I could look right through the green, firm sod, as if it had been green glass, and the flat earth as round as a bullet, and that I could see within it a multitude of cobolds sporting with silver and gold. Head over heels they rolled about, struck one another with the precious metal, and blew gold-dust playfully into each others' faces. My ugly companion stood half in, half out; he made the others reach him heaps and heaps of gold, and showed it to me, laughing, then flung it back again to ring down the sides of the unfathomable abyss. Then, once more, he showed the gold coin that I had given him to the cobolds below, and, half dead with laughter, they craned up to hiss me. Finally, they all pushed out at me their pointed fingers, stained with ore, and wilder and wilder, and louder and louder, and crazier and crazier, the crowd of them climbed up to me; then was I seized with horror, as my steed had been before me.

I put both spurs into him, and for a second time I was whirled in a mad gallop through the woodland.

“When at last I halted again, the cool of the evening was about me. Through the branches I saw a white footpath glimmer, which made me think that this must be the road back to the city through the forest. I began to work in that direction; but a dim visage, perfectly white, with features that were always changing, peered at me between the leaves. I tried to escape from it, but wherever I went it met me. At last I determined in anger that I would make my steed go straight for it, but then it dashed a white foam over me and the horse, so that we veered about bewildered. It drove us on step by step, always keeping us down the footway, and leaving our path clear in one single direction only. When we took this route, it kept close behind us, but did us no manner of harm. When, after a while, I glanced around me, I perceived that the white foaming face rose on an equally white and most gigantic body. I thought again and again that it must be a wandering waterspout, but I never could be perfectly sure about

it. Wearily both the steed and his rider yielded to the white man that drove us on, and all the while he nodded with his head, as much as to say, 'Quite right! quite right!' And so at last out we came at the end of the woodland, where I saw greensward and the waters of a lake, and your little cottage, and where the tall white man vanished."

"Ah! well to be out of it!" said the old fisherman, and then he began to discuss the best way in which his guest could get back again to his friends in the city. But at that moment Undine was heard giggling softly to herself. Huldbrand noticed it, and said :—

"I thought you were glad to see me yesterday? Why are you so pleased to hear us talk of my going away again?"

"Because you cannot do it," replied Undine. "Just you try to cross the swollen torrent with a punt or with a horse or by yourself, whichever you like best. Or, rather, do not try at all, for you will only be dashed to pieces by the stems and stones that are driven down it as swift as a shot. And, so far as



CHAPTER V

HOW THE KNIGHT LIVED BY THE LAKE

PERHAPS, my dear reader, it may have befallen you, after much beating hither and thither in the world, to reach at last a spot where you were contented to stay. That longing to be at peace at one's own fireside, which is inborn in every one of us, was once more awakened in you; you thought that home, with all the bloom of childhood and purest, most fervent love, would blossom forth again from precious places of burial, and that here it must be well to take up your abode and build. That you erred in so dreaming, and that you had afterwards in bitterness to expiate your error, is not to the point, and you do not want to be troubled with a memory of that harsh aftertaste. But call back

to you each inexpressibly rapturous anticipation, each angelic greeting of peace, and you will almost realise what the knight Huldrand experienced while he sojourned on the point of land that ran out into the lake.

Often, with secret satisfaction, he would notice that every day the forest torrent ran on with a wilder flood, as though its bed grew broader and broader, and so promised to extend still further his isolation on the islet. Part of the day, however, he wandered about with an old cross-bow, which he had found in a corner of the cottage and had furbished up, watching for the birds which flew over his head, and, when he could manage to hit them, carrying them back to the kitchen to be roasted. If he brought such booty with him, Undine scarcely ever failed to scold him for so wickedly robbing the dear creatures of the air, sailing up there in the sea of azure, of their innocent lives; she would even burst into bitter tears when she saw the dead birds. But if he came back home and had shot nothing, she scolded him none the less, that through his negligence and want

of skill they were obliged to put up with fish and shrimps for dinner. Her fantastic anger always gave him the most exquisite pleasure, the more so as she was almost sure, after an outburst of petulance, to lavish delicate caresses upon him. The old folks had come to an understanding about the intimacy of the young couple : they treated them like lovers betrothed, or rather like a pair of married people, who, to help them in their advanced age, had come to the island to live with them. This sequestered existence made the young Huldbrand almost fancy that he was already Undine's bridegroom. He had the illusion that no world existed on the other side of the encircling torrent, and that it was quite vain to imagine that he should ever mix any more with his fellow-men ; and if now and again he heard his grazing horse neigh to him, as if rousing him and calling him to knightly deeds, or if his scutcheon flashed out upon him from the midst of the embroidery of the saddle and the caparison, or if his beautiful sword all unawares fell from the nail from which it dangled in the cottage, gliding with a shock

out of the scabbard, he quieted his dubious thoughts by saying : “Undine is no fisherman’s daughter, but without doubt, and according to all probability, was born the scion of some mysterious princely house in a country far away.”

And now it grew odious to him to hear the old wife scold Undine in his presence. The roguish maiden had no scruple in openly laughing these reproofs to scorn, but it made him feel as though his wife were being attacked ; and yet he could not blame the old woman, for Undine always deserved at least ten times as much scolding as she got. So the end of it would be that he would remain just as fond as ever of the housewife, and would take up again the pleasant peaceful tenour of his life.

At last, however, his quiet of mind was disturbed. It was the habit of the fisherman and the knight, at dinner, and at supper too, if the wind howled outside, as it almost always did at nightfall, to regale one another with a mug of wine. But by this time they had exhausted the whole store which the fisherman had in one journey after another brought from the

city, and the two men quite lost their temper about it. Undine made the roof ring with her laughter, but neither of the men joined in her fun with their usual gaiety. When evening was drawing in she left the cottage. She said she was weary of looking at two such long-drawn, tiresome faces. As the weather seemed settling down to storm in the twilight, and as the waves were already howling and dashing, the knight and the fisherman sprang in terror to the door, in order to prevent Undine from going out, for they recollected their agony on the first night which Huldbrand spent at the cottage. But Undine faced them, clapping her hands together with a pretty gesture.

“What will you give me, if I bring you some wine? Or rather, you need not give me anything,” she proceeded, “for I shall be amply repaid if it makes you more amusing company than you have been to-day. You may come with me. The forest torrent has thrown up a cask on the bank, and you may condemn me to go to sleep for a whole week, if it is not a wine-cask.”

The men followed her, and they really did find, in a creek of the bank that was hemmed in by bushes, a cask which roused their hopes : it certainly looked as though it might contain the noble liquor that they longed for. They all rolled it to the cottage as fast as they could, for there were signals of bad weather coming in the evening sky, while the breakers on the lake tossed their white heads foaming, as if they were peering up at the rain that was so soon to pour down upon them. Undine gave the men what help she could, and when the rain suddenly began to burst from the heavy clouds she looked up into the sky and said :—

“Take care that you do not wet us : we shall not be safe under a roof for a long time yet.”

The old man reproved her for addressing the elements in so presumptuous a tone, but she giggled softly to herself, and certainly no one seemed any the worse for it. Oddly enough, they all three managed to reach the pleasant hearth without getting wet, and it was only when the cask had been tapped and tested, and had supplied a strange but

excellent vintage, that the rain broke forth out of the dark clouds and the storm sang through the twigs of the trees and over the crested waters of the lake.

Several bottles were soon filled from the great cask, and a supply provided that would last for many days. Drinking and jesting, and safely housed from the fury of the weather, they sat together in the glow of the fireside. Then the old fisherman spoke, and all of a sudden in a very serious way :—

“ Ah ! thou mighty God, how we enjoy here Thy goodly gift, and yet he to whom it lately belonged must have left his life for pledge down there in the river.”

“ Oh, never mind about him ! ” said Undine, and with a smile she lifted her glass to the knight. But Huldbrand continued :—

“ By the honour of a gentleman, good father, could I by so doing find and save him, I would grudge no wandering through the dark out there, and no danger. But I can tell you this, that if ever I come again to the haunts of men I will seek out

that fellow or his heirs, and I will pay for this wine twice and three times its value."

That pleased the old man; he nodded approval at the knight, and now, with an easy mind and a clear conscience, he emptied his glass. But Undine said to Huldbrand :—

"You may do what you please with your compensation and your gold. But it was a stupid idea to run out and search. I should cry my eyes out if you got lost, and you must confess that it would be nicer to stay with me and drink good wine."

"Why, yes, of course!" Huldbrand answered, smiling.

"Well, then, how silly it was of you to talk like that. Everybody is bound to take care of himself; and what do other people matter?"

The housewife turned from her with a sigh, shaking her head; the fisherman forgot how fond he was of the pretty maiden, and reproved her.

"One would think heathens and Turks had brought you up," he concluded by saying. "God pardon you and me for it, you naughty child."

“Yes, that is all very well, but that is my opinion,” continued Undine, “whoever may have brought me up, and all your words don’t alter the case.”

“Be silent!” said the fisherman sternly, and she, who in spite of all her pertness was obviously frightened, clung trembling to Huldbrand, and asked in quite a whisper :—

“Are you angry too, my beautiful friend?”

The knight pressed her soft hand and stroked her hair. He found nothing to say, for annoyance at the harshness of the old man towards Undine sealed his lips, and so the two couples sat there, angry with each other, in an embarrassed silence.

CHAPTER VI

A WEDDING

A FAINT knocking at the door sounded through this silence, and alarmed every one who was sitting in the cottage. It sometimes happens that a very trifling occurrence, which is quite unexpected, produces an extraordinary agitation of mind. But in this case it must be recollected that the notorious forest lay close to them, and that their point of land was unapproachable for human visitors. They looked anxiously at one another; the tapping was repeated, accompanied by a deep sigh; the knight reached for his sword. But the old man said quietly, "If it is what I fear, no weapons will help us."

Meanwhile, Undine approached the door, and said in a cross and saucy voice, "If you are up to any

mischiefs, you Earth-Spirits, Kühleborn shall teach you better manners."

The alarm of the others was increased by these amazing words; they gazed in wonder at the girl, and Huldrand was on the point of addressing a question to her, when somebody outside said: "I am no earth-spirit, but a spirit that still is housed in an earthly body. If you are willing to help me, and if you fear God, you people inside the cottage, then let me in!"

But, while these words were being spoken, Undine had opened the door, and with a lamp had thrown light out into the stormy night. They saw out there an aged priest, who shrank back at the unexpected sight of such a lovely maiden. He was convinced that so splendid a vision at the door of so lowly a cottage must be a trick played upon him by the invisible world, so he began to pray: "All good spirits, praise the Lord God!"

"I am not a ghost," said Undine, smiling. "Do I look so ugly? At all events, you can see for yourself that pious words do not frighten me. I

know about God, and how to praise Him. Every one after his kind, and to that end hath He created us. Step in, reverend father : you will find good folk here."

The clergyman entered, bowing after some hesitation, and he looked both kind and venerable. But water was dripping from every fold of his dark robes, from his long white beard, and from the white locks of his hair. The fisherman and the knight led him into an inner room and gave him other clothes, while they handed out the garments of the priest to the women to be dried. The old gentleman thanked them very graciously and pleasantly, but could not be persuaded to try on the splendid mantle which the knight urged upon him. Instead of that he chose an old gray overcoat of the fisherman's. When they came back again into the sitting-room the housewife handed the priest at once her great arm-chair, and would not be pacified until he had seated himself in it, "for," said she, "you are old and weary, and a man of God as well."

Undine pushed under the stranger's feet the little

stool on which she was used to sit by Huldbrand's side, and in many ways she waited upon the good old man with graceful and civil offices. Huldbrand teased her about it in a whisper, but she answered him quite gravely :—

“He serves Him who has made us all. It is not a thing to be joking about.”

The knight and the fisherman then pressed food and wine upon the priest, and he, when he had eaten and drunk, began to tell them how that yesterday he had started from his cloister on the opposite shore of the great lake to travel to the bishop's see, in order that he might tell the bishop what misery the late floods had caused to the cloister and its manorial villages. But after going far out of his way, on account of these same floods, he had been obliged that evening, as night was coming on, to persuade two stout boatmen to ferry him over an arm of the lake which had broken its bounds.

“But scarcely,” he continued, “had our little bark touched the waves, than a frightful storm burst upon us, raging over our very heads. It seemed as

though the waters had only been waiting for us in order to begin the most giddy whirling dance around us. The oars were soon torn out of the hands of my guides, and floated shattered on the waves farther and farther in front of us. We ourselves flew helpless hither and thither, and were driven by the frantic forces of nature towards this distant shore of yours, which we perceived with difficulty through the fog and foam. Meanwhile the skiff whirled onwards more wildly and more swiftly. I know not whether it perished, or whether I plunged out of it in the dark anguish of approaching hideous death, but at any rate I was borne on until a wave lifted me up under the trees of your island."

"You may well say island!" exclaimed the fisherman. "A little while ago it was a point of land. But now, since the forest torrent and the lake have been so frenzied, we no longer know ourselves."

"I happened to notice," said the priest, "while I crept in the darkness along the water, meeting nothing but wild noises in my ears, that at length a beaten path seemed to disappear into the hubbub.

Then I caught the light of your cottage, and felt my way here, whither I cannot enough thank my heavenly Father for having, after saving me from the waters, brought me, into the midst of such pious folk as you are ; and that so much the more as I cannot be sure whether in this life I shall ever see again any other human beings than you four."

"What do you mean ?" asked the fisherman.

"Do you then know how long this riot of the elements will last ?" replied the clergyman. "And I am stricken in years. It may well be that the stream of my existence may gradually sink under the earth, ere the rage of yonder torrent be appeased. And, moreover, it were not impossible that the foaming water might so swell on between you and the forest, as that you might be so far divided from the rest of the world, that your frail fishing-boat might no more be able to cross the lake, and that in their distraction the inhabitants of firm land might altogether forget you."

At this the old housewife crossed herself and said, "May God forbid !" But the fisherman looked at her smiling, and replied :—

“Why, there would be nothing new in that, especially for you, dear wife. For years past, have you gone any farther than to the confines of the forest? And who have you seen, except Undine and me? It is only very lately that the knight and the priest have joined us. They will stay with us, if we are turned into an island and forgotten, and you at least will be all the better off for that.”

“I don’t know,” said the old woman : “it would be a terrible thing to realise that one was cut off from all other people for ever, even though one does never know them or see them.”

“But then you’ll stay with us, you’ll stay with us,” whispered Undine in a very soft voice, half singing, and clinging still closer to Huldbrand’s side.

But he was drowned in his own strange fancies. The world beyond the forest torrent seemed, since the priest’s last words, to have been receding farther and farther from him ; but the blossoming island, on which he was living, grew greener, and smiled on him with redoubled sweetness. His bride bloomed like the loveliest rose on this little atom of the earth’s

surface, and indeed on the whole earth itself, and here was the priest they needed. But the fair maiden caught an indignant glance of the housewife's, scandalised that Undine should press so closely to her lover in the very presence of the holy man: it seemed as though a stream of scolding words must follow. Then the knight could restrain himself no longer, but, turning to the priest, he said :—

“You see before you here a bridegroom and a bride, reverend sir, and, if this girl and these good old fisherfolk have no objection, you shall unite us this very evening.”

The two old people were greatly startled. They had now and again thought of such a possibility, but even to one another they had never expressed their thought in words, and now, when the knight spoke out in this plain way, there seemed something novel and monstrous in the idea. Undine suddenly became quite grave, and looked down meditatively in front of her, while the priest inquired more exactly what the circumstances were, and assured himself of the old folks' consent. After a great deal of discussion,

everything was satisfactorily cleared up. The housewife went to arrange the bridal chamber for the young people, and to look for two consecrated candles which had been a long while in her possession. The knight meanwhile drew in his golden chain, and was about to twist off two of its rings, that he might exchange them with the bride. But she, when she saw what he was doing, seemed to swim up out of the depths of her thought, and said :—

“Not so ! My parents did not send me out into the world quite a beggar. Indeed, they must have known that sooner or later such an evening as this would come to me.”

So saying, she sped out of the door, and came back in a moment with two valuable rings, one of which she presented to her bridegroom, while she kept the other herself. The old fisherman gazed at her in amazement, and so still more did the housewife, who at this instant returned, for they knew that the child had never shown them these jewels.

“My parents,” replied Undine, “had these little things sewn into the beautiful dress that I was

wearing when I came to you. But they forbade me ever to speak of them to any one until my wedding-night. So I quietly took them out of doors and hid them until to-day."

The priest interrupted any further flow of questioning and surprise by lighting the consecrated candles, putting them on the table, and bidding the betrothed couple to stand before him. Then he wedded them, with brief and solemn words, the old folks blessed the young ones, while the bride leaned against the knight trembling slightly and in deep thought. Then the priest all at once said: "What odd people you are! Why did you tell me you were the only human beings here on the island? And yet all the time I was conducting the ceremony I saw opposite me a fine, tall man in a white mantle looking in at the window. He must be in front of the door at this moment, and perhaps he wants something in the house."

"God forbid," said the old wife, starting, while the fisherman shook his head without a word, and Huldbrand leaped to the window. He could not

help thinking he saw a streak of whiteness, which immediately and totally disappeared into the night. He persuaded the priest that he must have made a complete mistake, and they all sat down happily around the hearth.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT ELSE HAPPENED ON THE WEDDING NIGHT

ALL through the marriage service Undine had behaved with the greatest propriety, but as soon as it was over all the odd pranks that were in her rose to the surface with more audacity and impudence than ever. She teased her bridegroom and her foster-parents and even the priest, to whom she had just been so very respectful, with every kind of childish whimsy, and when the housewife was beginning to have something to say in the matter, the knight instantly silenced her by speaking in a very significant way of Undine as his wife. But, as a matter of fact, the knight himself was by no means overpleased with Undine's childish extravagance; yet no signs and no whisperings and no words of blame had any effect

upon her. Whenever the bride observed that her lover was displeased—and now and then she did observe it—she became quieter at once, sat down beside him, whispered something in his ear with a smile, and smoothed the gathering wrinkles out of his brow. But the moment after she would begin again with some mad prank or other, and all would be worse than ever. At length the priest said very gravely but very kindly: “My sweet young friend, one cannot look at you without being diverted, but do remember so to tune the music of your soul that it shall ever chime in harmony with that of your wedded husband.”

“Soul!” said Undine, and laughed. “That sounds very pretty, and may be a very wise and proper rule for most people. But if one has not got such a thing as a soul, what is to be done then, I should like to know? And that is the case with me.”

The priest, greatly wounded, kept silence in a holy anger, and turned his eyes sorrowfully away from the girl. But she went up to him caressingly, and said:—

“No, listen to me first, before you look so cross, for it grieves me that you should look like that, and you ought not to grieve any creature who has done nothing to harm you. Only be patient with me, and I will tell you exactly what I mean.”

They could see that she was preparing to tell them something very explicitly, when suddenly she stopped as though some inward horror had seized her, and broke into a copious flood of bitter tears. They could not tell what to make of her, and each in his different way gazed at her with solicitude. Then, at last, drying her tears and looking earnestly at the priest, she said :—

“To have a soul must be a delightful thing, but a most fearful thing too. Would it not be better—tell me, sir, in God’s name—would it not be better to have nothing to do with it?”

She was silent once more, as though her tears were pent up, while she awaited an answer. All the persons in the cottage had now risen from their seats, and recoiled from her with horror. But she seemed to have eyes for the priest only, while an expression

of the most vivid curiosity was painted on her features—an expression which struck the others with positive alarm.

“Heavy must be the burden of a soul,” she continued, while no one replied to her, “heavy indeed. The very idea of its approach overshadows me with sorrow and anguish. And ah! a little while ago I was so happy, so light-hearted!”

And she broke into a fresh paroxysm of weeping, and hid her face in her dress. Then, with a solemn countenance, the priest turned to her, and conjured her to throw off all disguise in case any wicked thing was in her. But she sank at his knee, repeating all the pious words he said, and praising and thanking God that she was at peace with all the world. Then finally the priest said to the knight: “Sir Bridegroom, I leave you alone with her to whom I have wedded you. So far as I can divine, there is nothing that is evil about her, although much that is strange. I commend her to your care and fealty and love.”

So saying, he went out, and the fisherman followed him, making the sign of the cross.

Undine had sunk to her knees; she uncovered her face, and she said, glancing shyly at Huldbrand :—

“ Ah ! you do not wish to have me any longer, and yet, poor wretched child that I am, I have done no harm.”

She looked at him with an air so utterly pathetic and touching that her bridegroom forgot all his terror and suspicion, and hastening to her he clasped her in his arms. Then through her tears she smiled; it was as when the sunrise lights up the little rills.

“ You cannot leave me,” she whispered familiarly and confidently, stroking the knight’s cheeks with her soft hand. He resolutely put away from him the fearful thoughts which still lurked in the recesses of his mind—thoughts which would fain persuade him that it was an elf or even a wicked illusion from the world of spirits that he had married. But, strive as he would, he could not prevent one question from crossing his lips :—

“ Darling Undine, do tell me one thing—what was it you said about earth-spirits when the priest knocked at the door, and about Kühleborn ? ”

“Fairy tales ! children’s fairy tales !” said Undine, laughing, restored all at once to her accustomed gaiety. “I began by frightening you, and you ended by frightening me. That is the end of the song, and of our wedding-night !”

“Ah ! no, that is not the end,” said the enamoured knight. He blew out the candles, and, with a thousand kisses, led his lovely bride, by the light of the moon now shining brightly through the casement, into their bridal chamber.



CHAPTER VIII

THE DAY AFTER THE WEDDING

THE young couple were awakened by the clear light of morning. Undine shrank bashfully underneath the coverlid, while Huldbrand lay quietly staring before him. Whenever he had fallen asleep during the night he had been disturbed by strange and horrible dreams of phantoms, who endeavoured with horrid grins to disguise themselves as fair women, or else of fair women whose faces suddenly became the masks of dragons. And when he awakened in the grip of these hideous visions, the pale, cold light of the moon would be streaming through the window. He would glance in terror at Undine, on whose bosom he had fallen asleep, and who now lay by him in unruffled beauty and sweetness. Then he

would press a fugitive kiss on the rosy lips, and would fall asleep again, only to be aroused by fresh horrors. But now that, completely awakened, he went over all this experience in his mind, every doubt was removed that in his error he had entertained regarding his lovely lady. He very frankly prayed her to forgive him the wrong he had done her, but she merely held out her beautiful hand to him, gave a very deep sigh, and was silent. But an inexpressibly tender look in her eyes, such as he had never seen there before, left him in no doubt that the heart of Undine was wholly without guile towards him.

He cheerfully arose, and went forth to their housemates in the common room. The three were seated, with anxious looks, round the hearth, not one of them having been brave enough to say his or her thought aloud. It looked as though the priest were inwardly engaged in prayer that all evil might be averted. But when they saw the young bridegroom enter with such a happy mien, the look of care was smoothed out of all their faces; and

the old fisherman actually began to rally the knight in such a seemly, honest fashion that even the old housewife smiled a pleasant smile. And now Undine herself was ready at last, and stood in the doorway. Everybody wished to greet her, and everybody could but notice how strange a look the young wife bore, and yet how familiar. The priest was the first to welcome her with paternal love beaming in his eyes, and as he lifted his hand in benediction the lovely woman sank to her knees trembling before him. She very humbly begged his pardon for all the foolish things that she must have said the day before, and entreated him in tones of deep feeling that he would pray for the health of her soul. Then she rose, kissed her foster-parents, and said, thanking them for all their goodness :—

“ Oh, now I feel in my heart of hearts how much, how inexpressibly much, you have done for me, you dear, dear people ! ”

They could scarcely disentangle themselves from her embraces, but no sooner did she perceive that the housewife was thinking about the breakfast than she

stationed herself at the hearth, cooked and arranged and managed everything, so that only the most trifling labours were left for the old mother to attend to.

She was like that all through the day—quiet, kind, and attentive, a little housemother, and at the same time a little tenderly bashful and maidenly being. The three, who had known her for so long a time, expected every moment to see a transformation back into her capricious mood. But they looked for it in vain. Undine remained as gentle as an angel, and as placid. The priest could not turn away his eyes from her, and over and over again said to the bridegroom : “Sir, through my unworthy means, the grace of Heaven wedded you yesterday to a treasure ! Preserve it as you should, and it will tend to your welfare through time and through eternity.”

When evening came, Undine hung with a tender meekness on the knight’s arm, and gently drew him to the door, where the setting sun was lighting up the moist grass, and gleaming round the tall slender stems of the trees. In the eyes of the young wife there

swam, as it were, a dew of melancholy and of love, a tender sorrowful secret seemed hanging on her lips, a secret that was translated only in sighs that were scarcely audible. Silently she led her lover farther away; when he spoke, she replied only with looks which might be not wholly pertinent to his questions, but in which there lay a whole heaven of love and shy devotion. So they reached the bank of the swollen forest torrent, and, to the astonishment of the knight, they found that its waters had so far retired and had become so quiet that no trace was left of their former rage and volume.

“By to-morrow,” said the lovely wife with a tear in her voice,—“by to-morrow it will have quite subsided, and then no one can prevent you from riding off, whither you will.”

“Not without you, little Undine,” answered the knight as he laughed: “even if I wanted to escape you, Church and State, Priest and Emperor, would combine to bring you back your fugitive.”

“It all depends on you, it all depends on you,” whispered the girl, half weeping, half smiling. “But I

think you will want to keep me, for I am so very fond of you. Now, take me over to the little island, that lies in front of us. It shall be decided there. I could very easily slip through the wavelets by myself, but it is so delightful to rest in your arms, and, if you cast me off, at all events I shall have been resting sweetly there for the last time."

Huldbrand, strangely agitated and alarmed, knew not what to reply. He took her in his arms, and carried her over, now for the first time realising, as he did so, that this was the very island whence on that first night he had borne her back to the old fisherman. He laid her down, a lovely burden, on the soft grass, and would have seated himself caressingly beside her; but she said, "No! over there, opposite me! I wish to read your eyes before your lips can speak. Listen attentively to what I am going to tell you." And then she began.

"You must know, my sweet darling, that in the elements there exist beings whose outer semblance is almost the same as your own. They but seldom allow you to gaze upon them. In the flames glitter

and sparkle the marvellous salamanders; deep within the earth the lean, spiteful gnomes have their dwelling; through the woodlands flit the wood-folk, whose home is in the air; and in the lakes and streams and rivulets there moves the endless race of spirits of the water. In ringing vaults of crystal, through which heaven looks down with sun and stars, these have their abode; lofty trees of coral, loaded with blue and ruddy fruitage, flourish in those gardens, where the inhabitants walk on pure sea-sand, or over fair and variegated shells. All that the ancient world could boast of beauty, all that our world of to-day is not worthy to enjoy, that the streams concealed with their secret veils of silver, and below them sparkle now those noble memorials, bedewed by those loving waters which allure them out of their exquisite moss-blooms and tufted reeds. But there they dwell, and are gentle and mild to look upon, most of them fairer far than humankind. Many a fisherman has rejoiced to surprise a delicate water-girl, rising from the floods and singing. Of her beauty he has told his fellows, and men have come to name such

strange maidens Undines. You, my dearest, are at this moment gazing upon just such an Undine."

The knight endeavoured to persuade himself that his lovely wife was simply indulging in one of her pranks of mystification, and was entertaining herself by teasing him with a motley screed of legends. But, however hard he tried to think it, he could not persuade himself for a moment that it was so; a wild shudder passed through him; unable to pronounce a word, he stared with unaverted eye at the pretty narrator. But she mournfully shook her head, sighed out of a full heart, and continued as follows:—

"We should be far better off than you other human beings—for human beings we consider ourselves, having the semblance and the body of humanity—but for one great disadvantage. We and those who resemble us in the other elements, we vanish and are gone, breath and body, so that no trace of us remains behind, and when you others on some future day shall wake to a purer life, we shall be what sand and smoke and winds and waves are made of. For no souls have we: it is the element that moves us, often,

so long as we live, obeys us, when we die, turns us to dust; and we rejoice, without a peevish sigh, as do nightingales and little golden fishes and the other pretty children of nature. Yet all creatures desire to rise to higher things. So my father, who is a mighty prince of waters in the Mediterranean Sea, desired that his daughter should in measure possess a soul, and in consequence should share many of the sufferings of those in whom souls are born. But one of us can only win a soul by the most intimate union in love with one of your race. Now I do possess a soul; to you I owe this soul, O inexpressibly beloved one, and I will be grateful to you for it if you will not that my whole life through should be made wretched. For what would become of me, if you were to avoid and repulse me? But I could not deceive even to retain you. And if you are going to repulse me, do it now, and pass back alone to yonder shore. I will plunge into this cascade, which is my father's brother, and leads a strange hermit's life here in the woodland, far from all old comrades. But strong is he, and more worth than many mighty rivers, and more precious,

and as it was he who brought me here to the fisherman, me a gay and laughing child, he will lead me back again to my parents—I, with my soul, a loving, suffering woman.”

She would have said more, but Huldbrand cast his arms about her full of the tenderest agitation and love, and bore her back again to shore. Then, with tears and kisses, he swore that he would never leave his darling wife, and held himself a happier man than that Grecian statuary Pygmalion, whose fair marble was brought to life for him by the grace of Lady Venus. In sweet contentment Undine hung upon his arm as they wandered back to the cottage, and now she realised from the depths of her heart how little need she had to regret having deserted the crystal mansions of her wondrous father.

CHAPTER IX

HOW THE KNIGHT TOOK HIS YOUNG WIFE WITH
HIM

WHEN Huldbrand next morning awoke from slumber, he missed his lovely companion at his side, and he began directly to give way again to those ominous forebodings which told him that his marriage and the exquisite Undine were nothing more than a fugitive illusion and imposture. But with that she entered at the door, kissed him, sat down on the bed-side, and said :—

“ I went out rather early to see whether Uncle would keep his word. He has already drawn all the waters back into his peaceful channel, and now is flowing through the woodland like the sober hermit that he used to be. His comrades in the water and in

the air have all gone to rest; everything is peaceful around us, and you can journey homewards dry-foot as soon as you will."

It seemed to Huldbrand as though he must be dreaming with his eyes wide open, so little sense could he find in this strange relation of his wife. But he did not allow her to perceive this, and the illimitable sweetness of the dear woman soon set every secret presentiment to rest. As he was standing a little while afterwards with her at the door, and was gazing over the verdant point of land with its bright boundaries of water, he felt so happy in this cradle of his love that he said :—

"Why must we start to-day? In the world outside we shall find no days more delicious than those we have lived through in this our secret hiding-place. Let us at least see the sun go down from here two or three times more."

"As my lord would have it!" replied Undine in a graceful humility. "The only thing is that the old folks could in no circumstances have parted from me without pain, and that if we give them time to

observe in me the workings of a real soul, and the springs of genuine love and honour, their poor eyes will certainly go blind with the multitude of their tears. At present they suppose my quietness and docility to be of no more significance than is the restfulness of the lake when the air is tranquil, and my affection no deeper than that of a sapling or a floweret. Do not make me choose the very moment when a heart agitated with love has newly been bestowed upon me, to take it from them for ever; and yet how could I hide from them the new conditions, should we continue to stay here together?"

Huldbrand agreed that she was right. He went to the old man, and made arrangements for the journey, proposing to start immediately. The priest offered himself as a companion to the young couple; the knight and he soon mounted the young wife on horseback, and rapidly set forth with her across the dried-up bed of the woodland torrent into the forest. Undine wept silently but bitterly; the old folk lamented her aloud. It seemed as though they

already had a foreboding of what they were losing in their sweet foster-daughter.

The three travellers had entered in silence the deepest shadows of the woodland. It was a pretty sight in that green hall of leafage to see the lovely woman seated on her noble, richly-caparisoned steed, and on one side of her the venerable priest in the white robe of his office, on the other the blooming youthful knight in his bright many-coloured raiment, girt with his splendid sword, each stepping carefully beside her. Huldbrand had no eyes save for his fair bride. Undine, who had dried her gentle tears, had only eyes for him, and their looks conversed in a quiet speech without words, which was first interrupted by a slight interchange of greeting between the priest and a fourth fellow-traveller whom they now observed for the first time.

He wore a white garment, exactly like the priest's robe of office, except that the hood was pulled far down over his eyes, and that the whole dress flowed round him in folds so wide that every moment he was obliged to sweep it up and throw it over his



arm, or by some other such contrivance prevent it from hindering his movements. When the young couple had perceived him, he said:—

“And so I have been living many years here in the woodland, venerable sir, without ever imagining that any one would call me a hermit. For, as I said, of penance know I nothing, and have no idea that I require it. The fact merely is that I am fond of the woodland, because it looks so curiously pretty, and amuses me so much, when in my fluttering white garments I wander through the shadowy places and the foliage, until by chance a fair beam of the sun shall pierce through and flash upon me.”

“You are a very strange individual,” replied the priest, “and I should like to know more about you.”

“And who then are you, to change the subject?” asked the stranger.

“They call me Father Heilmann,” said the holy man, “and I come from Mariagruss Cloister, on the other side of the lake.”

“Ah! indeed,” replied the stranger. “My own

name is Kühleborn, and as a mere matter of courtesy I might add Herr von Kühleborn, or Baron von Kühleborn; for I am as free as the birds in the woodland, and a little freer. By the way, I have something to tell that young woman over there."

And before any one knew what he was doing he was on the other side of the priest, close beside Undine, and was stretching up to whisper something in her ear. But she withdrew in alarm, saying :—

"I have nothing more to do with you."

"Ho! ho!" laughed the stranger, "what a monstrous grand marriage you must have made, to have nothing more to do with your own relations! What, not a word for Uncle Kühleborn, who carried you to this spot on his back?"

"I must ask you," replied Undine, "to let me see no more of you. I am afraid of you now, and if my husband sees me in such strange company, and with such odd relations, will he not be startled?"

"Nonsense!" said Kühleborn. "You must not forget that I am your guardian here. If it were not for me the riotous earth-spirits might play

stupid practical jokes with you. So let me accompany you in this quiet way; the old priest there seems to recollect me much better than you do, for he just now assured me that my face seemed very familiar to him, and that I really must have been near him when he fell into the water. It is true, I was, for I was the identical sheet of water which shipped him out, and on which in process of time he swam safe to shore."

Undine and the knight looked at Father Heilmann, but he seemed to be walking in a dream, and no longer to understand what was said to him. Then Undine said to Kühleborn:—

"I see already before us the end of the woodland. We need your help no more, and nothing can frighten us so much as you do. Therefore, in the name of mercy, be so good as to disappear, and let us go our way in peace."

But Kühleborn seemed very unwilling to do this. He made an ugly face, and grinned at Undine, who screamed out loud and turned to her husband for help. Like a flash, the knight was on the other side

of the horse, and swinging his sharp blade against Kühleborn's head. But it struck a torrent, which came streaming down from a lofty rock, and suddenly poured over them in a splashing that sounded almost like laughter, and drenched them to the skin. The priest, as though suddenly awakened, said :—

“ I have long been expecting that, the brook ran so close beside us on the hill-side. At first it almost seemed to me as though it were a human being and could speak.”

In Huldbrand's ear the waterfall distinctly sounded these words :—

“ Brisk knight, stout knight, I rage not, I wrangle not. Guard always just so well your lovely bride, knight so stout, brisk young blood ! ”

A few steps more, and they were in the open. The imperial city lay sparkling before them, and the evening sun, which gilded its roofs, dried the soaked raiment of the wanderers.

CHAPTER X

HOW THEY LIVED IN THE CITY

THE sudden disappearance of the young knight Huldbrand von Ringstetten had created a great sensation in the imperial city, and all those to whom his gallant bearing in tournament and dance had endeared him, and all who recalled his gentle, pleasant manners, were sorely grieved. His servants would not quit the place without their master, although not one of them had the courage to ride after him in the shadow of the dreadful forest. So they remained in their lodging, vainly hoping, as men are used to do, and keeping the memory of the departed one alive with their lamentations. As there soon followed the heavy storms and floods, nobody doubted any longer that the handsome stranger was

lost, and Bertalda too bewailed her fate quite openly, cursing herself for having tempted him to take that monstrous ride into the woodland. Her ducal foster-parents were come to take her away, but Bertalda persuaded them to stay with her, until some certain knowledge could be arrived at as to Huldbrand's life or death. She tried to persuade several young knights, who were paying assiduous court to her, to follow the noble adventurer into the forest. But she could not encourage them to expect her hand as the reward of their devotion, since she had not given up all hope of yet bestowing it on the returning Huldbrand, while for the sake of a glove or of a ribbon, or even of a kiss, no one would stake his life, especially on the errand of searching for so dangerous a rival.

When, therefore, Huldbrand thus unexpectedly and suddenly returned, the servants and the inhabitants of the city, and almost all other persons, with the exception of Bertalda, rejoiced; but while the rest were quite pleased to see that he brought back with him an exquisite bride, and Father Heilmann as a witness to the wedding, it was impossible that Bertalda

should do otherwise than be distressed. In the first place she had really learned to love the young knight with all her heart, and then, through her sorrow at his disappearance, all eyes had been instructed to notice a great deal more than she now wished them to see. She behaved, however, like a clever woman—adapted herself to her circumstances, and was as kind as possible to Undine, whom everybody in the city supposed to be a princess that Huldbrand had released from some wicked magician in the woodland. If any one asked herself or her husband for further particulars, they knew how to keep silence or else turn the conversation; Father Heilmann's lips were sealed for all idle gossip, and moreover Huldbrand took care that he was soon conducted back to his cloister, so that folks had to be satisfied with wild conjecture, and even Bertalda herself knew no more of the truth than other people.

Undine moreover endeared herself to this charming maiden more and more every day. "We must have been acquainted before," she used often to say to her, "or else there must be a strange bond of

sympathy between us, because without a reason—understand me, without some deep secret reason—no one becomes so fond of another person as I became of you the very moment I first saw you.” And Bertalda too could not deny that she was unable to help feeling the greatest confidence in and affection for Undine, although she had every species of reason to bitterly dislike this her so fortunate rival. Actuated by this sense of mutual attachment, the one with her foster-parents, the other with her husband, did everything in her power to put off further and further the date of their departure. To so great a length did it go that it was positively proposed that Bertalda should for a time accompany Undine to Ringstetten Castle, at the sources of the Danube.

They were discussing this, one beautiful evening, while they wandered to and fro by starlight in the market-place of the imperial city, which was surrounded by lofty trees. The young couple had persuaded Bertalda, when it was already rather late, to join them in a stroll, and all three were walking securely up and down under the dark-blue sky, often

interrupting their conversation to pay a tribute of admiration to the sumptuous fountain in the midst of the square, and to its wonderful murmuring and babbling. All seemed to them delicate and pleasant; between the shadows of the trees there stole the glimmering lights of the houses near by, a quiet noise of children at play and of other happy human beings reached them there; they seemed so isolated and yet so much at home in the very heart of the bright and living world; what might appear difficult by daylight now seemed to solve itself, and the three friends could no longer understand how any objection could have been raised to the plan that Bertalda should travel with them. But just as they were positively fixing the day of their common departure a tall man approached them from the centre of the market-place, bowed respectfully to them all, and whispered something in the young wife's ear. Displeased both with the interruption and with the intruder, she yet went a few steps aside with the stranger, and the two began to whisper to one another in what seemed a foreign tongue. Huldbbrand fancied that he recognised the

strange man, and stared so hard at him that he neither heard nor answered Bertalda's astonished questions. Presently Undine joyfully clapped her hands and left the stranger standing there. With many nods of the head and hasty, uncertain steps the latter withdrew, and walked into the fountain. Now Huldbrand thought that he was quite certain of his facts, but Bertalda asked:—

“What did the fountain-man want with you, dear Undine?”

The young wife laughed mysteriously, and replied:—

“The day after to-morrow, on your birthday, you shall know, you darling child!”

And not a word more could be extracted from her. She invited Bertalda and her foster-parents to dine with her that day, and soon after this they parted.

“Kühleborn?” said Huldbrand to his lovely bride, with a secret shudder, as soon as Bertalda had left them, and they were picking their way home alone through the darkening street.

“Yes, it was he,” answered Undine, “and he

wanted to waste my time with all sorts of stupid stuff. But in the middle of it all, quite against his wish, he delighted me with a most welcome message. If you want to know what that was, my dear lord and master, all you have to do is to command, and I will tell you every word of it. But if you would like to give your Undine a very, very great pleasure, you will wait until the day after to-morrow, and take your share of the surprise."

The knight gladly vouchsafed to his wife the favour that she asked, and even in her sleep she murmured, smiling, "How delighted and how surprised that dear, dear Bertalda will be when she learns what the message of the fountain-man was!"

CHAPTER XI

BERTALDA'S BIRTHDAY

THE company were seated at table; Bertalda, adorned with jewels and flowers, the various gifts of her foster-parents and her friends, was at the top of the table looking like a goddess of spring; at her side were Undine and Huldbrand. When the rich banquet was over, and the dessert was set on, the doors were thrown open after the good old German custom, so that people outside could see and share in the pleasures of the quality. Servants distributed wine and cakes among the spectators. With concealed impatience, Huldbrand and Bertalda awaited the promised announcement, and could not refrain from constantly glancing at Undine. But that lovely lady remained perfectly quiet, and, merely smiling to

herself, looked straight in front of her. Any one who was acquainted with her intention could see that every moment she was at the point of betraying her delightful secret, and yet always renounced the indulgence of doing so, just as children sometimes treat their most delicious morsels. Bertalda and Huldbrand shared this ecstatic feeling, awaiting in hope and anxiety the new happiness which should presently descend upon them from the lips of their friend. Then some of those who were present prayed Undine for a song. She seemed pleased at the proposal, bade one fetch her lute, and sang the following words :—

Morning so bright,
Blossoms so gay,
Grasses so fragrant and tall
On the shore of the billowy lake !
Among the grasses
What shimmers so white ?
Is it a great white bloom
Fallen from heaven into the lap of the meadow ?
Ah ! it is a tender child !
Unwitting, with the flowers it sporteth,
Even as they were the golden lights of morning.
Oh, whence ? sweet vision, whence ?

Afar, from an unknown shore,
The lake hath borne thee here.
Nay, thou tender creature, grasp not
With thy little hand these grasses.
They can give thee back no greeting,
Strange and mute their flowers to thee,
They can but adorn themselves,
Pour their own rich hearts in perfume.
None can fold thee to a bosom,
None supply a mother's breast.
Early at the gates of being,
Heaven still smiling from thy features,
Art thou of the best bereavèd,
Child of grief, and know'st it not.
See! a noble duke comes riding,
Checks his steed's proud step before thee,
Bears thee off to share his castle,
Where the arts and graces flourish.
Thou hast gained an endless guerdon,
Blooming, loveliest in the land!—
Ah! but with life's rarest treasure
Left upon an unknown strand.

She lowered her lute with a melancholy smile; the eyes of Bertalda's ducal foster-parents stood full of tears. "So was it that morning when I found you, you poor sweet orphan!" said the Duke, deeply moved. "The fair songstress was right: we have never been able to give the best things to you."

"But you must hear what happened to the

poor parents," said Undine, she struck the chords, and sang :—

Mother searches all the chambers,
Cracks that scarce would hide a mouse,—
Finds for all her lamentations
Nothing but an empty house.

Empty house ! oh, words of sorrow,
For a mother's heart distrest,
Where by day her child went roaming,
And by night was rocked to rest.

Green once more the beech-trees burgeon,
High in heaven rides back the sun,
But, thou mother, vainly seeking,
Shalt not greet thy little one.

And, when airs of eve are breathing,
Father comes as sunset dies.
Though he veil his grief in smiling,
Tears shall brim into his eyes.

Father knows the silent chamber
Hides a phantom, chill and black,
Only hears pale mother moaning,
And no child that greets him back.

“ Oh, for God's sake, Undine, where are my parents ? ” said Bertalda, weeping. “ You surely know, you surely have discovered, wonderful woman that you are, or else you would not so have torn

my heart. Are they, perhaps, here now? Can it be——”

Her eyes surveyed the splendid company, and rested on a lady of a royal house, who sat close to her foster-parents. Then Undine turned herself towards the door, while her eyes overflowed with exquisite emotion.

“Where, then, are those poor, patient parents?” she asked, and the aged fisherman and his wife stepped forward out of the throng of spectators. Their eyes, as if in inquiry, hung now on Undine, now on the lovely lady who must be their daughter. “It is she,” stammered Undine in a rapture, and the two old folks hung, weeping aloud and praising God, on the neck of their long-lost daughter.

But in terror and anger Bertalda broke away from their embraces. It was too much for her proud spirit to be so recognised at the very moment when she had made up her mind that her former glory was but to be enhanced, and that the regal canopy and crown hung just above her head. It flashed through her mind that her rival had arranged all this merely in



order to humiliate her in the presence of Huldbrand and of all the world. She scowled at Undine; she scowled at the two old people. The ugly words "Trickstress!" and "Venal wretches!" were hissed from her lips. Then said the old fisherman's wife, as if speaking to herself, "Ah! God, this is a wicked woman, and yet in my heart I feel that it was I who gave her birth." The old fisherman kept his hands clasped, and quietly was praying that she might not prove to be their daughter. Pale as death Undine turned from the parents to Bertalda, from Bertalda to the parents, as if she had been suddenly flung out of the heaven of her dreams into an agony and a terror that she never before had realised even when dreaming.

"Have you a soul, then? Have you really a soul, Bertalda?" she exclaimed to her indignant friend, as if trying to recall herself to her senses out of some sudden aberration or terrifying illusion of the night. But as Bertalda became more and more violently exasperated, as the repulsed parents began to moan aloud, and the spectators divided themselves into two

contending and eager parties, she desired in so dignified and serious a manner to be permitted to speak in her husband's room that in a moment all was silence around her. She then passed to the upper end of the table, where Bertalda had been sitting, humbled yet proud, and made, while all eyes were bent upon her, the following address :—

“ You, who gaze at her so unkindly and so vindictively, and have so grievously ruined my pleasant feast, oh ! God, I had no conception that you could be so foolish and so hard-hearted, and all my life long I shall never be able to comprehend it. That I have gone the wrong way to work in all this affair is no fault of mine ; believe me, it is your fault, little as you may be inclined to suppose it. I have not much to say to you, but this one thing must be said—I have told no lie. I can and I will give you no proof beyond my bare assertion, but to that I will swear. I was told the fact by him who decoyed Bertalda away from her parents into the water, and afterwards placed her on the green meadow in the Duke's path.”

“ She is a sorceress,” shrieked Bertalda, “ a witch,

who deals with wicked spirits! She admits it herself!"

"That I do not," said Undine, a whole heaven of innocence and confidence in her eyes. "I am no witch. Only look at me, and see."

"Then she lies and blusters," Bertalda continued, "and cannot prove that I am the child of these base folks. My ducal parents, I entreat you, lead me forth from this assembly, and from this city, where people do nothing but defame me."

But the noble old duke remained standing where he was, and the duchess said: "We must thoroughly understand the situation. God forbid that, till the truth is known, I put one foot out of this hall."

Then the old fisher-wife approached her, bowed deeply to the duchess, and said:—

"My heart lies open before you, O you noble and God-fearing lady. I must tell you that if this wicked maiden is my daughter, she bears a mark like a violet between her shoulders and another on the instep of her left foot. If she will but consent to leave the hall with me——"

“I will not undress myself before that peasant-woman,” said Bertalda, proudly turning her back upon her.

“But before me you will,” said the duchess very gravely. “You will follow me, madam, into yonder room, and the good old wife will come too.”

The three disappeared, and all the rest of the assembled people remained in silence, on the tip-toe of expectation. After a little space the women returned, Bertalda as pale as death, and the duchess said :—

“Right must be right; and so I declare that our lady hostess has spoken nothing but the truth. Bertalda is the fisherman’s daughter, and that is all that those here gathered need to know.”

The princely pair withdrew, in company with their foster-daughter. At a sign from the duke, the fisherman and his wife followed them. The other guests went away, silent or secretly murmuring, and Undine sank bitterly weeping into the arms of Huldbrand.

CHAPTER XII

HOW THEY JOURNEYED FROM THE IMPERIAL CITY

THE Lord of Ringstetten would have been well pleased if all the events of this day could have been prevented. But, as it turned out, he could not but be gratified to find his exquisite wife so pious, gracious, and dignified. "If indeed I have given her a soul, it must be admitted that I have given her a better one than my own," and so he began to console the weeping Undine, and to arrange to leave on the very next day a place which, after such an incident, could not but be distasteful to her. Yet it is certain that popular opinion about her had not altered. As something extraordinary had always been anticipated, the strange discovery of Bertalda's parentage occasioned little surprise, and every one was set against that

young lady by the unseemly violence of her behaviour. But of that the knight and his lady knew nothing ; besides, the one would have been just as painful to Undine as the other, and so there was nothing better for them to do than to leave the walls of that ancient city behind them as soon as possible.

At daybreak a neat carriage was waiting for Undine in front of the door of their inn. The horses of Huldbrand and his squires were impatiently stamping the pavement. The knight was conducting his beautiful lady from the door, when a fisher-maiden stepped across her path.

“We do not need your wares,” said Huldbrand.
“We are on the point of departure.”

Then the fisher-maiden began to weep bitterly, and they perceived that it was Bertalda. They went back with her into the apartment, and learned from her that the duke and the duchess were so incensed at her rudeness and passion on the previous day that they had entirely withdrawn their protection from her, although not without presenting her with a generous dowry. At the same time the fisherman

had been well rewarded, and had the same evening returned with his wife to their tongue of land.

“I wished to go with them,” she continued, “but the old fisherman, who they say is my father——”

“They say truly, Bertalda,” Undine interrupted. “The being whom you took to be the fountain-man positively assured me of it. He wanted to urge me not to take you with me to Ringstetten Castle, and so he divulged this secret.”

“Well, then,” said Bertalda, “my father—since it must be so—my father said, ‘I will not take you with me till you are a changed girl. Come to us alone through the notorious woodland; that shall be the test of whether you are fond of us. But do not come as a lady; come as a fisher-lass.’ I want to do as he said, for all the world has forsaken me, and I will live and die as a poor fisher-maiden alone with these poor parents of mine. But, to tell the truth, the idea of the woodland frightens me. There are horrible phantoms living there, and I am so timid. But what can be done? I only came here now to beg the noble lady of Ringstetten to

pardon me for acting so rudely yesterday. Oh, madam, I feel you meant it kindly, but you did not know how what you said would wound me, and many a mad, saucy word came streaming from my lips in my anguish and astonishment. Ah! forgive me! forgive me! I am so utterly miserable. Only think for yourself what I lately was; what I was no earlier than at the opening of your banquet yesterday; and what I am to-day."

She sobbed out these words in a flood of tears, and next moment, in her bitter weeping, her arms were round Undine's neck. It was long before that lady, deeply moved, could contrive to utter a syllable, but at length she said:—

"You shall go with us to Ringstetten; all shall be exactly as we arranged it should be; only call me again by my name, and no longer 'madam' or 'my lady.' You see we were exchanged when we were infants; then our fates diverged; but henceforward we will be so close to one another that no human power shall be able to put us asunder. But the first thing is that you must go with us to Ring-

stetten. How, as sisters, we will divide the good things of life, can be decided there."

Bertalda glanced shyly at Huldbrand. He felt sorry for the handsome, afflicted maiden; he held out his hand to her, and told her caressingly to trust him and his wife.

"To your parents," he said, "we will send a message to explain why you have not come;" and he was going on to suggest many other plans regarding the good fisher-folk, but he saw how painfully Bertalda started at their mention, and so he amiably refrained from saying more. But he took her arm and handed her into the carriage, and Undine after her, and trotted gaily beside them, playing the guide so smartly that soon the imperial city and all its melancholy memories lay far behind them; and now the ladies breathed a fresher air, rolling along through the beautiful country which spread around them on each side.

After certain days' journey they came one beautiful evening to the castle of Ringstetten. The guards and retainers had much to recount to their

young master, so that Undine stayed alone with Bertalda. They climbed on to the high wall of the stronghold, and enjoyed the exquisite view over Schwabia, which expanded on every side. Then a tall man stepped up to them who greeted them respectfully, and who almost reminded Bertalda of the fountain-man in the imperial city. The likeness grew still more undeniable when Undine glanced back at him with a displeased, almost threatening, aspect, and when with rapid steps and nodding head he retreated, as before, and disappeared in a neighbouring shrubbery. But Undine said:—

“Don’t be alarmed, dear little Bertalda: this time the ugly fountain-man shall do you no harm.”

And with that she told her the whole story from beginning to end, and who she herself was, and in what circumstances Bertalda had left the fisher-folk, and she, Undine, had come to them. At first the girl was startled at these revelations. She thought her friend must suddenly have gone out of her mind. But she became persuaded more and more that all was true in Undine’s plausible narrative, which

explained past events so satisfactorily, and what still more persuaded her was the inward sense which is so seldom deceived as to what is really the truth. It seemed strange to her to be thus living in the midst of one of those tales of wonder which she had so often heard recounted. She gazed at Undine with respect, but could no longer resist a shudder which seemed to pass between herself and her friend, and was still wondering, when they sat down to supper, how the knight could have so loved and attached himself to a being which, since these latest revelations, could not but appear to her more like a ghost than a woman.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW THEY LIVED AT RINGSTETTEN CASTLE

HE who writes down this story, because it stirs his heart, and because he hopes that it may do the same to others, prays you, dear reader, for a favour. Forgive him, if now he is content briefly and in general terms to tell you what happened during a somewhat long period. He is well aware that it might cunningly be described how step by step the affections of Huldbrand began to be diverted from Undine to Bertalda, how Bertalda ever with more glowing passion came forward to meet the young man, and how he and she seemed rather to dread the poor wife as if she were a stranger to their affections than to pity her, how Undine wept, and how her tears were like the gnawings of conscience in the heart of the knight, without ever reawakening

the old love he bore her, so that, though sometimes he was kind to her, yet he would soon turn away from her with a cold shudder, and seek the human maiden, Bertalda; the writer knows that all these matters could, and perhaps should, be dwelt upon at length. But it would be far too painful to him to do so, for he has experienced such things in life, and is too full of their memory not to shrink from them. No doubt you have just the same feeling, dear reader, since such is the common fate of mortal man. Happy for you, if in this commerce you have gained more than you have inflicted, for here is it more blessed to receive than to give. For in such a case there only glides through your soul at these intimations a pleasurable pain, and perhaps a gentle tear slips down your cheek at the thought of that withered garden-plot which was once so deeply your delight. But enough of this; we will not pierce the heart with a thousand different pangs, but only briefly record that once it happened as I said above.

Poor Undine was very sad, and the other two were not genuinely happy; but Bertalda thought, in

the slightest deviation from what she wished, to trace the jealous oppression of the offended lady of the house. Accordingly she had accustomed herself to a dictatorial manner, to which Undine gave way in melancholy resignation, and which was usually supported in the firmest manner by the infatuated Huldbrand. What still further disturbed social life in the castle were all sorts of strange apparitions, which confronted Huldbrand and Bertalda in the vaulted passages of the fortress, and of which nothing had previously been heard within the memory of man. The tall white man, in whom, only too well, Huldbrand recognised Uncle Kühleborn, and Bertalda the ghostly fountain-man, often rose menacing before them both, but particularly in front of Bertalda, so that already once or twice she had been made quite ill with the terror of it, and often determined that she would quit the castle. But she stayed on, partly because she was so very fond of Huldbrand, and partly because, as they had never come to any definite understanding, she thought her innocence would protect her; partly, too, because she did not know

whither to turn her steps. The old fisherman, on receiving the Lord of Ringstetten's message that Bertalda was staying with him, had replied in a scrawl which his age and little habit of writing made it very difficult to read. He said in it:—

“I am now become a poor aged widower, for my dear, faithful wife has been taken from me by death. Yet lonely as I am, sitting here by myself in my cottage, I would rather have Bertalda's room than her company. Only see to it that she does my darling Undine no injury, or else my curse be upon her.” These last words Bertalda cast to the winds, but she was careful to remember what her father said about staying away, as we usually do in cases of this kind.

One day Huldbrand had just ridden off, when Undine, collecting the servants of the house, told them to bring a great slab of stone, and with it securely to close the splendid fountain which stood in the middle of the castle-court. The servants objected that in that case they would have to fetch up their water from far down in the valley. Undine gave a melancholy smile.

“ I am sorry to increase your work, dear children,” she said ; “ I would gladly fetch up the pitchers of water myself, but this fountain must be closed. Take my word for it that there is nothing else to be done, and that by doing it we spare ourselves a far greater misfortune.”

All the servants rejoiced to find their gentle mistress so courteous ; they asked no more questions, but seized the monstrous slab. It rose under their hands, and was ready to be poised over the fountain, when Bertalda came running up and called out to them to stop. Out of this well the water had to be fetched with which she refreshed herself by washing, and she would never consent to its being closed. But on this one occasion, though Undine was so accustomed to yield, she remained firm ; she said that as housewife it was for her to decide how the arrangements of the household were most conveniently to be carried out, and that she would submit in these matters to the contradiction of none save her spouse and lord.

“ But look, oh ! look,” cried Bertalda, vexed and

anxious,—“look, the poor water is curling and winding about, because it is to be shut up from the clear light of the sun, and the pleasant sight of human faces, whose mirror it used to be.” As she said this, the water in the well positively began in the most extraordinary way to hiss and mount; it seemed as though something wanted to struggle forth, but Undine only with the more decision insisted that her orders should be carried out. The castle retainers were as glad to obey their gentle mistress as they were to vex Bertalda, and, however rudely the latter might storm and threaten, in a very short time the slab lay fixed over the mouth of the fountain. Undine leaned pensively over it, and with her lovely finger she wrote upon its surface. But she must have concealed in her hand something very sharp and biting, for when she turned away, and the others approached, they found inscribed upon the stone all sorts of strange characters which none of them had ever seen before.

In the evening Bertalda received the knight, on his return home, with tears and complaints of

Undine's conduct. He looked sternly at his wife, and she, poor lady, dropped her eyes with a melancholy air. Then she said, with great composure :—

“My lord and husband dooms none of his vassals until he has given him a hearing. How much the less, then, his wedded wife.”

“Say, then, what drove you to this strange act ?” said the knight, with a dark look on his face.

“I must be quite alone with you to tell you,” sighed Undine.

“You can tell me just as well in the presence of Bertalda,” he replied.

“Yes, if you order me to do so,” said Undine, “but do not order it. I pray and beseech you, do not order it.”

She looked so humble, kind, and obedient as she said this, that the knight's heart was invaded by a sunbeam out of happier days. He took her affectionately by the arm, and led her into his chamber, where she spoke as follows :—

“You know our wicked uncle Kühleborn, do you not, my dear lord, and have often been vexed to meet him in the passages of this castle? He has sometimes frightened Bertalda so much as to make her ill. It seems that he has no soul, he is nothing but an elemental mirror of the outer world, which can never flash back the inner one. Well, he sees from time to time that you are displeased with me, that in my childish way I weep on account of it, that Bertalda chooses that very moment for laughter. The consequence is that he imagines all sorts of stupid things, and wants to be interfering in our affairs. What would be the use of my being cross with him, and telling him to go away? He does not believe a word I say. His poor nature has no conception of the fact that the pains and the pleasures of love are so closely intermingled, and depend so much on one another that to divide them is impossible. Smiles break forth out of the heart of tears, and tears out of eyes that are in the very act of smiling.”

She looked up at Huldbrand, smiling and weeping, and all the enchantment of the old love leaped back

into his heart. She felt it, pressed him closer to her bosom, and amidst tears of joy continued :—

“As the destroyer of our peace would not listen to words, I was obliged to bar the door against him. And the only door by which he reaches us is that fountain. He is at enmity with the other water-spirits of this neighbourhood ; from the next valleys, and beyond the Danube, if some of his good friends have flowed into that river, his empire begins again. That is why I allowed the slab to be poised above the fountain, and wrote runes upon it, so that he should never interfere again with you, or with me, or with Bertalda. It is true that with a very slight exercise of strength human beings could remove the slab ; there is nothing to hinder that. If you desire it, do as Bertalda wishes, but be sure that she does not know what it is she asks. Naughty Kühleborn has specially aimed at her, and suppose that should happen which he always is trying to prophesy to me, and what very well might happen, without your meaning any harm by it—ah ! darling, there might be no little danger for you too.”

Huldbbrand was deeply conscious of the magnanimity of his charming wife, who had set about so diligently to deprive herself of her terrible protector, and had even in so doing been actuated by generous thought of Bertalda. He caught her tenderly in his arms, and said with emotion :—

“The slab shall stay there, and all shall be, now and for ever, as you desire it to be, my sweetest little Undine.”

She modestly caressed him, happy once more to hear the words of love which had so long been unspoken, and at last she said :—

“My dearest one, since you are so very sweet and kind to-day, may I venture to ask you for a favour? Only see, you are like the summer-time. Even in its highest splendour it puts on the flaming and thundering crown of magnificent storm, in which its aspect is that of a real monarch and earth-deity. So, every now and then, you lighten with your tongue and your eyes, and it becomes you well, even though, in my poor folly, it sometimes makes me weep. But don’t ever be angry with me on a piece of water, or

even when we are near any waters, for then my relations would regain authority over me. They would pitilessly snatch me from you, because they would think that one of their race was being injured, and for all the rest of my days I should have to live down there in the halls of crystal, and should never have leave to come up to you again, or, if they did send me up to you, oh, God! that would be infinitely the worst of all. No, no, my sweet one, don't let that happen, as you love your poor Undine."

He solemnly promised to do what she desired, and husband and wife left the chamber infinitely happy and full of mutual love. Then Bertalda came, with some workmen whom she had already sent for from the valley, and said in a sulky way, which she had of late adopted :—

"Well, now the secret interview is over, the slab may come off. Go, you men, and set about it."

But the knight, revolted by her impudence, said briefly and very sternly, "The slab is to stay there;" and he rebuked Bertalda for being so disagreeable to his wife. On this the workmen, secretly smiling,

went away, while Bertalda, pale with fury, rushed to her own room.

The hour for supper came, and no Bertalda appeared. She was sent for, but the chamberlain found her apartments empty, and brought nothing back but a note addressed to the knight. He opened it in amazement, and read :—

“I feel with shame that I am nothing but a poor fisher-wench. In the wretched cottage of my parents I will expiate having forgotten this fact. Live happily with your pretty wife ! ”

Undine was grieved to the heart. She fervently begged Huldbrand to hasten after their fugitive friend and bring her back again. Alas ! she had no need to urge it. All his old inclination for Bertalda was reawakened. He rushed all over the castle asking if no one had seen which path the lovely being had taken in her flight. He could learn nothing, and was already on horseback in the court of the castle, ready to ride off at a venture along the road by which he had brought Bertalda on the first occasion. Just then a messenger came hurrying back to say that he

had found the young lady on the path leading down into the Black Valley. Like a bolt from the bow the knight sprang to the gate to proceed in the direction indicated, without listening to the agonised voice of Undine shouting from the window :—

“Into the Black Valley? Oh, not there, Huldbrand, not there! Or else, in the name of God, take me there with you!”

When she saw that it was quite in vain to appeal to him, she ordered her white palfrey to be saddled with all speed, and followed the knight without permitting a single retainer to accompany her.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW BERTALDA WENT HOME WITH THE KNIGHT

THE Black Valley lies deeply sequestered in the mountains. What it may now be called no man knows. At that time the country folk gave it its name from its deep obscurity, buried in the shadow of lofty trees, and particularly of pines. Even the rivulet which poured down between the cliffs looked quite black, and as though less pleased than waters are that have the blue heaven immediately over them. Now, as twilight was approaching, it looked singularly wild and gloomy between the heights. The knight stepped anxiously along the banks of the rivulet; he was now in terror lest, by pushing on so quickly, he might have passed the fugitive, now ready to hasten on with greater speed, in case she was concealed

somewhere in front of him. By this time he had penetrated somewhat deeply into the valley, and it was to be supposed that, if he was on the right road, he must soon overtake the maiden. The suspicion that he perhaps had missed her made his heart beat in anguish. If he should not find the tender Bertalda, what would be her fate in the threatening storm which now hung more and more ominously over the valley? At last he saw a white object on the slope of the mountain; it glimmered through the leafage. He thought he recognised the dress of Bertalda, and made straight for it. But his steed would not obey; it reared so violently, and he himself was so unwilling to lose time—especially as the thick under-wood made it extremely difficult to proceed on horseback—that he dismounted, and, tying the snorting horse to a maple, carefully worked his way on foot through the bushes. The twigs cruelly whipped his brow and cheeks with the cold dews of evening, a distant thunder rumbled beyond the mountains, everything looked so sinister that he began to feel a species of awe as he approached the white shape which now

lay near him on the ground. But he could quite clearly distinguish that it was the figure of a sleeping or a swooning woman, in long white garments, such as Bertalda had that day been wearing. He stepped close up to her, rustled the branches, clashed his sword—she did not move. “Bertalda!” he said softly at first, then louder and louder—she did not hear him. At last, as he shouted the beloved name with all his might, a dull echo came faintly back from the caverns of the valley: “Bertalda!” but the sleeper awakened not. He bowed down to her; the darkness of the valley and the approach of night forbade him to distinguish her features. But now, as with a kind of sad uncertainty he pressed close beside her on the ground, a flash of lightning suddenly illuminated the valley. He saw quite close to him a hideous and wasted countenance, and a dull voice that cried, “Give me a kiss, you love-sick shepherd!”

Shrieking with terror Huldbrand fled up the heights, the hideous figure pursuing him. “Go home!” it murmured, “the monsters are awake!”

Go home ! I have you now !” And it clawed at him with long white arms.

“Spiteful Kühleborn !” cried the knight, summoning his confidence, “so ’tis you, is it, you hobgoblin ! There’s a kiss for you !” And with that he smote it in the face with his sword. But it vanished away, and a drenching stream of water left the knight in no doubt of the nature of the enemy with whom he had contended.

“He wants to frighten me away from Bertalda,” he said to himself aloud ; “he thinks that he will frighten me by his silly tricks into abandoning the poor distressed maiden to him, to bear the whole brunt of his revenge. But that shall he not, miserable elemental spirit that he is. The impudent goblin does not realise what the heart of a man can do, when that man throws into his doing the best forces of his life.” He felt the truth of his own words, and that he had spoken under the influence of a renewal of his manly courage. Accordingly, fortune seemed once more to smile on him, for scarcely had he got back to the spot where his horse was tied, when he heard quite

plainly the voice of Bertalda lamenting; she was so close to him that he could hear her weeping through the tumult of the thunderstorm. With winged feet he flew towards the sound, and discovered the shivering lady, who was vainly endeavouring to climb the heights, in order by any means to escape from the awful obscurity of the valley. But he threw himself tenderly across her path, and, firm and proud as had been her determination, she found it impossible to resist the happiness that her beloved friend offered her in releasing her from the hideous solitude that environed her, and in begging her to share once more the bright life in his hospitable castle. She scarcely said him nay, but followed him, although so wearily that the knight was glad to reach his steed, which he now eagerly untied, proposing to lift on to its saddle the lovely fugitive, and carefully to guide it by the bridle-rein through the doubtful shadows of the valley.

But the horse had been perfectly frenzied by the rude apparition of Kühleborn. It would have been difficult for the knight himself to leap on to the back

of the rearing and snorting animal : to lift the trembling Bertalda there was an absolute impossibility. Accordingly they determined to go home on foot. While the horse was pulling at the rein, the knight with his other hand supported the tottering maiden. Bertalda summoned her forces as well as she could, that she might pass quickly through the valley, but weariness weighed her down like lead, and her limbs quivered with weakness, partly from all the distress that she had undergone, from the adventure with Kühleborn, but partly also because of her incessant terror at the howling of the storm and the thunder through the mountain woodlands.

The end of it was that she slipped from the supporting arm of her guide, and, prostrate on the moss, she murmured : “ Oh ! let me lie here, noble sir. I give my folly all the blame, and now let me just perish here of weariness and distress.”

“ Never, never, my sweet friend, will I abandon you ! ” cried Huldbrand, vainly trying to hold in with his hand his frantic steed, which was now more troublesome than ever, and was beginning

to foam at the mouth. The knight was really glad to be able to hold it at a sufficient distance from the sunken lady, so that at all events she might be relieved from one element of danger. But he had gone only a few steps when she began again to wail and bemoan herself, and to call out after him, fancying that he was really going to desert her in that frightful wilderness. He positively did not know what he should do. He would gladly have given the infuriated animal its full liberty to rage away into the night, and so to give vent to its madness, had it not been that he feared that in this narrow pass its metal hoofs might thunder down upon the very spot where Bertalda lay.

In the midst of all this distress and embarrassment, it was with the greatest delight in the world that he heard a waggon slowly descending the stony road behind him. He shouted for help; a man's voice answered him, begging him to have patience, and promising him assistance. Immediately he perceived two grays approaching through the bushes, and the white smock-frock of their driver by the side of them,

and presently the great white linen cover which protected the goods that he was conducting. With a loud "Brr!" from the lips of their master the docile grays stood still. He came up to the knight and helped him to subdue the foaming animal.

"I see," he said, "what it is that the beast wants. The first time I went this way, my horses were just as troublesome. I must tell you that a wicked water-goblin lives here, and these jokes are what he enjoys. But I have learned a charm, and if you like me to whisper it into your horse's ear, you will find he will stand as quietly as my grays do."

"By all means try your plan and do it at once," cried the impatient knight. Then the carter bent the head of the rearing steed down to him and muttered some words in his ear. In an instant the horse stood appeased and perfectly quiet, while nothing but a certain heat and panting was left to show how extremely agitated it had been. Huldbrand had not much time to inquire the reason of the change. He made a bargain with the carter to take Bertalda up among the soft bales of cotton in his waggon, and to

bring her to Ringstetten Castle, while the knight should accompany her on horseback. But his horse now appeared to be so much exhausted in consequence of its former violence that it had not the power to carry its master so far. The carter, therefore, recommended the knight to climb into the waggon beside Bertalda, having fastened the horse behind.

“My grays can carry us all,” said the driver. The knight took his advice, climbed into the waggon with Bertalda, and his steed followed patiently, while the driver led on with active and yet heedful care.

In the quietness of the dark night, as they left the thunderstorm more and more completely behind them, in a happy sense of security and of comfortable motion, Huldbrand and Bertalda talked confidentially to one another. He jested with her tenderly about her peevish flight; with a modest emotion she excused herself; and out of every word that she said there shone, like a lamp, the love that filled her heart as she turned to him. The knight felt the full significance of the secret meaning of her words, and

a sense of mutual and tender confidence sprang up between them.

Then the carter suddenly shouted with his screaming voice, "Up! you grays! Up with your feet! Pull yourselves together, grays! Remember what you are!"

The knight leaned out of the waggon, and saw that the horses were stepping or rather positively swimming in the midst of a rush of waters; the wheels of the cart were whirling round and round like mill-wheels, and the carter had climbed up upon the vehicle to escape the rising flood.

"What kind of road is this? It seems to go along the bed of a river!" cried Huldbrand to the driver.

"No, sir!" he answered laughing, "it is the other way about, it is the river that is running along the middle of our road. See for yourself what a flood there is."

It was perfectly true; the whole valley was moving and rushing with the waters that had so suddenly gushed out and were still visibly rising.



"That is Kühleborn, the wicked water-goblin, trying to drown us!" cried the knight. "Don't you know any charm to suit him, my friend?"

"I know one," said the driver, "but I cannot and must not use it until you know who I am."

"Is this a time for asking riddles?" screamed the knight. "The flood is rising every moment, and what do I care who you may be?"

"You ought to care," said the driver, "for I am Kühleborn." So saying he thrust his withered face, laughing, into the waggon, but the waggon was a waggon no longer, the grays were grays no longer; everything vanished, melted into hissing clouds, and the very driver himself was drawn up into a gigantic wave, which forced the vainly-struggling horse under the tide, and grew and grew like a tower of moisture ready to topple on to the heads of Huldbrand and Bertalda, and bury them for ever under the ruin of its waters.

But at that very moment the sweet voice of Undine reached them through the turmoil, the moon stepped from a cloud, and Undine became visible on

the heights above the valley. She commanded, she threatened the floods, the ominous tower of waters shrank away muttering and murmuring, the streams ran gently in the moonlight; and like a white dove Undine was seen to dive downwards from the heights, to seize Huldbrand and Bertalda, and to carry them up to a fresh, green lawn on the heights, where she dispelled their weakness and terror by her assiduous cordials and caresses. Then she helped Bertalda to mount the white palfrey, which had carried her, and so all three proceeded back to Ringstetten Castle.

CHAPTER XV

THE JOURNEY TO VIENNA

AFTER the events we have just recorded, life went quietly and uneventfully at the castle. The knight became more and more conscious of his wife's saintly sweetness, which had been so splendidly displayed by her pursuing and saving them from the power of Kühleborn in the Black Valley. Undine herself enjoyed that peace and security which are never wanting to a conscience that feels that it has acted in the right way, and many a gleam of hope and love came to her from the reawakened love and esteem of her husband. Bertalda, for her part, was meek, grateful and modest, and she attempted to gain no advantages for herself from these manifestations. Whenever husband or wife proposed to discuss with

her either the closing of the fountain or the adventures in the Black Valley, she earnestly begged to be excused, giving as her reason that the former subject embarrassed her and the latter terrified her too much. Nothing more, therefore, was said about either, and why should there be ? Peace and joy had visibly taken up their abode in Ringstetten Castle. Everybody was quite certain of it, and believed that life would bring forth in future none but comely flowers and fruits.

In this delicious way winter had come and gone, and spring had peeped in upon mankind with its bright green buds and its pale blue sky. The mood of spring seemed their mood, and what wonder, then, that springtide's storks and swallows should bring them journeying thoughts ?

Once, while they were serenely wondering about the source of the Danube, Huldbrand happened to discourse about the splendour of the noble river, and how it flowed through hallowed countries gathering volume as it went, and how costly wines were grown upon its banks, and how with every step

of its course it clustered power and loveliness about it.

“How glorious it must be to follow its course as far as to Vienna!” exclaimed Bertalda, but no sooner had she said the words than, shrinking into herself in her present humility and modesty, she blushed and was silent. This touched Undine deeply, and in her eager desire to gratify her dear friend, she said:—

“What is there to prevent our taking this journey?”

Bertalda leaped for joy, and the two ladies instantly began to paint the charming voyage down the Danube in the liveliest colours. Huldbrand offered no opposition, except that he whispered in Undine’s ear:—

“But if we go so far, shall not we be once more in Kühleborn’s power?”

“Let him come!” she answered, laughing; “I shall be there, and he can’t do any harm in my presence.”

So with that the last difficulty vanished; they

prepared for the voyage, and started in the best of spirits and with the highest anticipations.

Is it not strange that things invariably turn out other than what we expected them to be? The malignant power, which lies in wait to deceive us, loves to lull its chosen victim to sleep with sweet songs and golden stories. On the other hand the messenger that brings salvation from heaven often raps sharply and terrifyingly at our door.

During the earlier days of their Danube voyage they were extremely delighted. Everything seemed to grow better and lovelier as they slipped down the waters of the majestic river. But at one singularly exquisite spot, from the hospitable beauty of which they had anticipated peculiar pleasure, that unruly fellow Kühleborn gave a wholly unexpected proof of his encroaching power. It amounted at first to no more than a trick of teasing, because Undine shouted into the rebellious floods or contrary wind and instantly subdued the power of the enemy, but the opposition would arise again, and again it would be needful for Undine to check it, so that the

comfort of the little company of travellers was entirely destroyed.

Soon the boatmen began for ever to be whispering to one another, and looking suspiciously at the three gentlefolks, whose servants themselves grew more and more to realise that something very unusual was taking place, and to watch their masters with anxious countenances. Huldbrand often said to himself in the depths of his heart :—

“This comes of like not being matched with like; it is a strange bond that a man makes with a mermaid.”

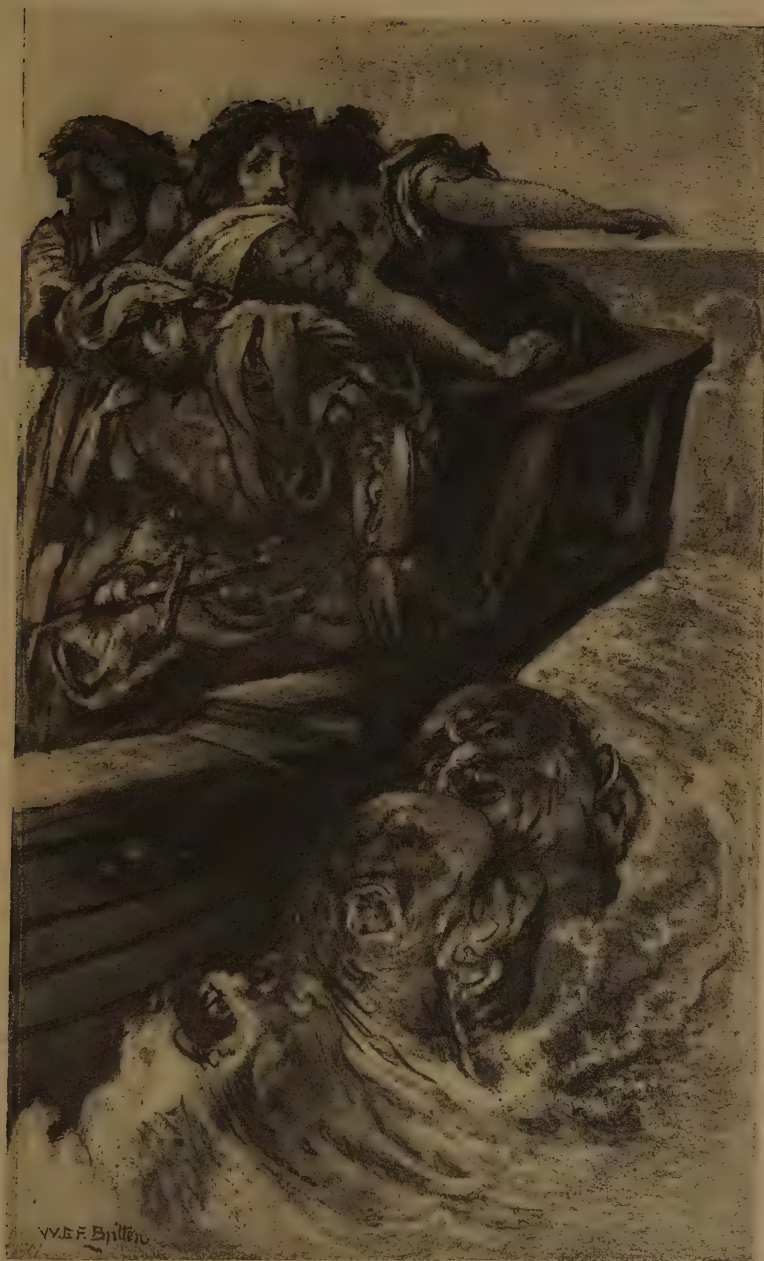
Excusing himself, as we are so apt to do, he would often think :—

“I did not know in the least that she was a mermaid! It is a wretched thing for me that every step I take is cursed and spoiled by her absurd relations, but it is by no fault of mine.”

By thoughts such as these he would fortify himself for the moment, but these reflections always left him more fretful and even more inimical to Undine. Already he looked at her with a surly

expression, and the poor lady well understood what he meant by it. Exhausted with distress at this, and not less with the constant effort to subdue the vivacity of Kühleborn, towards evening, as the boat glided gently along, she fell into a deep sleep.

But scarcely had she closed her eyes, when every one in the ship saw, on the side where he happened to be looking out, a hideous human head, which rose out of the waves, not as the head of a swimmer does, but quite perpendicularly, as though it were impaled on the surface of the water, yet proceeding at the same rate as the boat did. Each person wished to point out to the other the object which terrified him, and each perceived upon the other's face the same horror, but turned in another direction from that in which he himself saw the half laughing, half menacing apparition. But as each wanted to explain to the others what to look at, and shouted "Look there!" "No, there!" the awful apparitions were observed to be everywhere, and the whole river around the vessel was swarming with these hideous figures. The shrieks of terror which this provoked awakened Undine. As



her eyelids opened all the troop of wicked phantoms vanished. But Huldbrand rose in revolt at such ugly jesting. He would have broken out into wild curses, if Undine, with modest looks and gentle words of entreaty, had not said—

“For God’s sake, my husband! We are on the waters, do not be angry with me.”

The knight was silenced, sat down, and sank in a deep reverie. Undine whispered in his ear—

“Would it not be better, my darling, to resign this foolish expedition, and go back in peace to Ringstetten Castle?”

But Huldbrand murmured angrily—

“So I am to be a prisoner in my own castle, and only to breathe, so long as the fountain is closed? I only wish, then, that your crazy kindred——”

But with that Undine caressingly pressed her lovely hand to his lips. He was silent again, and remained so, meditating on what Undine had said.

Meanwhile Bertalda had abandoned herself to all sorts of fugitive ideas. She knew much of Undine’s origin, and yet not all, and in particular the fearful

Kühleborn had remained a horrible, but always quite insoluble, riddle to her, to such an extent that she was ignorant of his very name. While reflecting on all these extraordinary things, and without being conscious what she was doing, she unfastened a golden necklace which Huldbrand had lately bought for her from a wandering pedlar, and let it wave just above the surface of the river, diverting herself, half in a dream, with the bright shimmer that it gave, reflected in the sunset mirror of the waters. A huge hand suddenly rose out of the Danube, snatched at the necklace, and dragged it down. Bertalda screamed out loud, and a scornful sound of laughter echoed from the depths of the river. The anger of the knight now broke all bounds. Springing to his feet and staring down into the water, he cursed all who would force themselves into relation with him and his life, and called upon whomever it might be, nix or siren, to rise and face his naked sword. Bertalda wept for the loss of an ornament that she so much valued, and with her tears poured oil on the flame of the knight's anger, while Undine, leaning over the side of the

boat, kept her hand in the water, which continued half to rush upwards, half to mutter with an interrupted murmur, while she said to her husband :—

“My darling, don’t scold me here ; scold whom and what you will, but not me. You know why !”

And by a great effort he contrived to restrain himself, though he was stammering with rage, from making any direct attack upon her. Then, with her wet hand, which she had been holding under the water, she produced a magnificent coral necklace, which flashed so brilliantly that all eyes were nearly dazzled by it.

“Take this,” she said, holding it out pleasantly to Bertalda ; “I have had this brought as a compensation to you, and don’t be unhappy any longer, poor child.”

But the knight sprang between them. He tore the lovely trinket out of Undine’s hand, flung it back into the river, and shouted in a frenzy of rage—

“Then you are still in communication with them, are you? Stay with them and their gifts, in the

name of all witchcraft, and let us mortals be at peace, sorceress that you are."

But as he looked he saw poor Undine gaze at him with eyes streaming with tears, still holding out the hand with which she had so kindly endeavoured to pass her pretty gift to Bertalda. She went on weeping, more and more bitterly, like a gentle child that has been cruelly wounded though for no fault of hers. At last she said quite wearily :—

"Ah! sweet friend, ah! farewell! You ought not to have done that; but be loyal, so that I may be able to avert it from you. Ah! but now I must go, must go away out of this young life of ours. Oh woe, oh woe! what have you done, oh woe, oh woe!"

And with that she vanished over the edge of the boat. It was impossible to tell whether she stepped into the river, or was swept into it, both seemed true and yet neither. In a moment she was wholly engulfed in the Danube; only little waves kept sobbing round the bark, and seemed to be repeating,

almost inaudibly: "Oh woe! Oh woe! Ah! Be loyal! Oh woe!"

But Huldbrand flung himself in burning tears upon the deck of the vessel, and a deep swoon soon drew a merciful veil over his anguish.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT TO HULDBRAND

ARE we to grieve or to rejoice that our sense of affliction makes no abiding stay? I mean that of affliction which springs from so deep in the heart of life that it is so made one with the idea of the lost beloved that all the passage of life is but a priestly initiation into the worship of one vanished form, until the moment when the bolt that fell on him crushes us also. Many good men do remain priests of this order, but yet it is not the first real affliction any longer. Other extraneous images have forced their way across us; the mutability of all earthly things affects even our anguish, and accordingly I can but say: I grieve, that our sense of affliction has no abiding hold on us.

The Lord of Ringstetten experienced this too. Whether it was to his welfare, this tale shall shortly tell us. At first he could do nothing but weep bitterly, as the poor kind Undine had wept, when he tore the bright necklace out of the hand with which she sought to restore happiness and peace. And then he would stretch out his own hand, as she had done, and would weep anew, as she had. He nourished the secret hope that he might wholly waste away in tears. And have not similar thoughts pierced us all with their painful pleasure when we have been in deep distress? Bertalda wept with him, and they lived very quietly side by side in Ringstetten Castle, honouring Undine's memory, and having almost forgotten their previous inclination for one another. And the sweet Undine now often passed into the dreams of Huldbrand. She caressed him gently and tenderly, and then disappeared still weeping, so that oftentimes when he wakened he knew not why his cheeks were so wet : were they her tears, or but his own ?

But as time went by these visionary dreams

grew rarer, the sorrow of the knight less poignant, and yet perhaps in his life he would never have nourished another wish than to think of Undine and to talk about her, had it not been that the old fisherman unexpectedly made his appearance at the castle, and demanded that Bertalda should return with him as his daughter. He had heard of the vanishing of Undine, and he would not any longer consent to allow Bertalda to stay at the castle of an unmarried nobleman. "For," he said, "whether my daughter is fond of me or not I will not inquire, but her reputation is at stake, and when that is the case there is nothing more to be said."

The sentiment of the old fisherman, and the solitude which threatened to confront the knight in all the halls and corridors of his desolated castle when once Bertalda should have departed, brought to a crisis that inclination of Huldbrand's to the beautiful person of Bertalda which had hitherto been slumbering, and quite forgotten in the midst of his affliction for Undine. But the fisherman had much to urge against the proposed marriage. The

old man had been deeply attached to Undine, and he considered that nobody could be positively sure that the dear vanished one was really dead. But even if her corpse should lie stark and cold on the bed of the Danube, or have been carried out to the ocean by the river, still Bertalda was responsible for her death, and it was not seemly that she should occupy the place of the dear supplanted one. But the fisherman was also very much attached to the knight; the prayers of his daughter, who had become much more gentle and amiable, as also her tears about Undine, had to be taken into consideration, and the end of it was that he had to give his consent. There was then no opposition, and a messenger was sent off in haste to Father Heilman, who in earlier happy days had married Undine and Huldbrand, begging him to come to the castle to celebrate a second wedding.

But the holy man had scarcely read through the letter from the Lord of Ringstetten than he set out in much greater haste towards the castle than the messenger had which came to fetch him, When

on the steep path his breath failed him, or when his old limbs ached with weariness, he was wont to say to himself: "Perhaps there is still evil to prevent! Sink not, thou withered body, till thy goal be reached!" And with renewed vigour he would resume his labour, and move onward and onward, without resting or halting, until late one evening he entered the leafy courtyard of the castle.

The bridal pair sat arm in arm under the trees, the old fisherman in a brown study at their side. Scarcely had they recognised Father Heilmann, when they leaped up and hastened to welcome him. But he, without further speech, prayed the bridegroom to pass with him into the castle. As the knight paused and delayed before obeying this serious invitation, the holy priest said:—

"Why should I insist upon speaking to you in private, Herr von Ringstetten? What I have to say concerns Bertalda and the fisherman no less than it does you, and if one has to hear a certain thing it is best to hear it as soon as possible. Are you, then,

Knight Huldbrand, so absolutely certain that your first wife is actually dead? I am scarcely of that opinion. I will not dwell on what may have been the extraordinary circumstances of her disappearance, for I know nothing certain about them. But she was a most faithful and loyal wife to you, there is no question about that. And for fourteen nights past she has stood in dreams beside my bed, wringing her tender little hands in an agony, and softly sighing, 'Oh, prevent it, dear Father! I am still alive! Ah! save his body! Ah! save his soul!' I knew not what this vision of the night desired. Then came your messenger, and I hurried hither, not to wed you, but to separate those who must not be together. Leave her, Huldbrand! Leave him, Bertalda! He belongs to another. And is not grief for a vanished wife still painted on his pallid cheeks? No bridegroom looks like that, and the spirit says to me, either you must quit him, or you never will be blessed."

In their heart of hearts the trio acknowledged the truth of what Father Heilmann said, but they

refused to believe it. Even the old fisherman was now so befooled that he thought nothing else could come to pass than what in these last days they so often had discussed. In a wild and melancholy precipitation they combated the warnings of the priest, until, with a sad air, shaking his head, he departed from the castle, without even consenting to put up there for a single night or enjoying the refreshments prepared for him. Huldbrand, however, persuaded himself that the priest was a creature of caprice, and sent at break of day to the neighbouring cloister for one of the fathers, who agreed, without making any objection, to celebrate the marriage in the course of a few days.

CHAPTER XVII

THE KNIGHT'S DREAM

IT was between the darkness and the dawn of day that the knight lay half awake, half asleep, on his bed. When he tried to fall wholly asleep again, it seemed to him as though a horror stood and thrust him back, because there were ghosts in the land of sleep. But if he thought completely to rouse himself, there seemed to blow about him a noise of the wings of swans and caressing sounds of pleasure, which sent his brain reeling back into its doubtful state. At last he must have fallen asleep in good earnest, for it seemed to him as if the rustling of swans seized him on soft pinions and bore him far away over land and sea, singing all the while in a most delightful melody, "Sound of the swan! song of the swan!" More and

more definitely he kept saying to himself, "Perhaps this is death?" But probably it had another significance. Suddenly it seemed to him that he was being borne over the Mediterranean Sea. A swan was chanting harmoniously in his ear, "This is the Mediterranean Sea." And while he looked down on the waters they became transparent crystal, so that he could see through them down to the bed of the sea. He was glad of that, for he could see Undine, where she was sitting under the clear vault of crystal. She was weeping sorely, and looked much more sad than she did in happier hours, when he and she had lived together in Ringstetten Castle, especially at first, and towards the last, too, a little while before that luckless voyage down the Danube began. The knight could reflect on all this very thoroughly and deeply, but it did not seem that Undine was aware of his presence. Meanwhile Kühleborn had stepped up to her, and proposed to reprove her for weeping. Then she drew herself together, and gazed at him with a mien so majestic in entreaty that it almost frightened him. "If I do live here under the waters," she said, "I



have yet brought my soul with me. And therefore must I weep, even if you cannot divine what such tears can be. And they are blessed, as everything is blessed to one in whom a faithful soul resides." He shook his head incredulously, and said after some reflection, "And yet, my niece, you are subjected to the laws of our elements, and his life must be forfeited to you if he should wed again and be to you unfaithful." "Until this hour he remains a widower," said Undine, "and bears me in love upon his aching heart." "Yet is he a bridegroom also," laughed Kühleborn scornfully, "and in a day or two the priestly benediction will be uttered, and then must you slay the husband of two wives." "But I can't," Undine smiled back. "I have sealed up the fountain, and closed it against my like and me." "But if he quits his castle," said Kühleborn, "or if one of these days he should have the fountain reopened? For you may be sure he takes very little heed of all these things." "For that very reason," said Undine, and smiled once more through her tears,—“for that very reason he is now poised in spirit over the Middle Sea,

and in a warning dream listens to our speech. I have deliberately so arranged it." Then Kühleborn looked up spitefully at the knight, menaced him, stamped with his foot, and as swiftly as an arrow darted under the waves. It seemed as though rage had bloated him into a whale. The swans began to chant, to flutter, to fly, it seemed to the knight that he soared along over alps and over rivers, swooped at last into Ringstetten Castle, and awoke upon his bed.

It was true that he awoke upon his bed, and with that his squire came and told him that Father Heilman was still lingering in the neighbourhood : he had met him in the forest the night before under the shelter of a hut which he had constructed of the stems of trees, and had fitted up with moss and brushwood. When he asked him what he was doing there, since he would not give the benediction, he answered, "There are other benedictions than that which is given at the marriage-altar, and, if I am not come to the wedding, it may be I shall be needed for some other ceremony. We must be ready for all chances. Besides, there is no

great difference between wedding and weeping, and he who does not wilfully blind himself, has to recognise that."

The knight fell into all manner of strange speculation with regard to these words and to his dream. But he held it to be a very strong measure for a man to break off an engagement that he had thoroughly made up his mind to, and so the end of it was that no change was made in his plans.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW HULDBRAND CELEBRATED HIS WEDDING

WHEN I tell you what happened at the wedding festival in Ringstetten Castle, you will have the same impression as you would if you saw a multitude of brilliant and joyful objects heaped together, but black crape spread over them, out of the obscurity of which the whole splendour should appear less like something agreeable than like a conscious mockery of all earthly felicity. It was not, however, that any spectral horror disturbed the festal gaiety, for we are aware that the castle was fully protected from the tricks of the menacing spirits of the water. But the knight and the fisherman and all the guests felt as though the leading personage at the feast was missing, and as if this leading personage could be none other

than kind Undine, the universally beloved. No door could open but all eyes involuntarily turned in its direction, and when it proved to be nobody but the master of the ceremonies with a new bunch of keys, or the cup-bearer with a draught of still more excellent wine, everybody looked before him with a disappointed air, and the sparks of gaiety and joy which had flashed out for a moment were extinguished in the dew of melancholy memory. The bride was the most light-hearted person present, and the most contented, but even over her there came from time to time a sense of wonder that it should be she who was sitting at the top of that table in a green garland and with gold-embroidered garments, while the corpse of Undine lay stark and cold on the bed of the Danube or was being carried by the river out into the ocean. For since her father had spoken those prophetic words they were for ever sounding in her ears, and to-day more than ever they would not cease to haunt her.

Night had scarcely fallen before the company broke up ; not dissolved by the eager impatience of the

bridegroom, as are most wedding parties, but merely forced apart, in a dull and melancholy humour, by desperate forebodings of joyless dejection and ill. Bertalda passed away with her ladies, the knight with his servants, to disrobe; at this sad festival there was no talk of any jesting troop of maids and lads to accompany the bride and bridegroom.

Bertalda wished to change the current of her thoughts. She bade them spread out before her a magnificent ornament which Huldbrand had given her, as well as rich robes and veils, that she might choose those which would most brilliantly and becomingly enhance her morning toilette. Her maids took advantage of the occasion to chat much and gaily with their young mistress, and in their talk nothing was lacking which could enhance the beauty of the newly wedded pair. They were all becoming more and more absorbed in these considerations, when at length Bertalda, glancing in a mirror, sighed :—

“ Ah, but don’t you see these freckles coming on the side of my neck ? ”

They looked, and they really did notice what their beautiful mistress had referred to, though they called it nothing but a beauty-spot, a little mark that merely heightened the whiteness of the tender skin. Bertalda shook her head, and thought it would always be a blemish. "And I could get rid of it," she sighed. "But the castle fountain is closed, out of which they used to draw for me the water that had so rare a power to cleanse. Oh! if I could only get a bottle of it!"

"Is that all?" laughed a nimble maid, and slipped out of the room.

"She is not going to be so rash," said Bertalda no less pleased than astonished, "as to have the fountain-slab rolled away this very evening?" But they presently heard men crossing the courtyard, and could from the window see that the amiable maid was leading them straight to the fountain, and that they were carrying levers and other tools on their shoulders. "I really do wish it," said Bertalda, "if it does not last too long." And, secretly gratified that a hint from her could now carry so much weight, she

looked down at the work as it proceeded in the moonlit courtyard of the castle.

The men heaved with all their strength at the great slab. Now and then one would sigh at the thought that the work of their dear late mistress was being undone. But the toil proved really much less than might have been supposed. It seemed as though a force within the fountain was helping them to lift the stone. The astonished labourers said to each other, "You would fancy that the water inside had turned into a gushing spring." And the stone rose higher and higher, and almost without help from the labourers it slowly rolled with a dull thud upon the pavement. But at the same moment there rose from the opening of the fountain a white pillow of water high into the air. At first they thought that it really had turned into a spring, until they noticed that the soaring stream took the shape of a pale woman veiled in white. It wept bitterly, it wrung its hands in anguish about its head, and slowly, slowly it stepped towards the castle building. The castle servants started back from the fountain; the bride stood, pale

and stark with terror, at the window with her maidens. When the figure was close underneath her chamber, it gazed plaintively at her, and Bertalda fancied that beneath the veil she could perceive the pale lineaments of Undine. But the lamentable figure went by, heavily, constrainedly, slowly, as if to a place of execution. Bertalda screamed to them to call the knight, but not a menial stirred from her place, and the bride herself was dumb again, as though the sound of her own voice affrighted her.

While they were still standing in horror at the window, as motionless as statues, the dreadful visitant had reached the castle, had mounted the well-known steps, had passed through the well-known hall, weeping, weeping all the while. Ah! in what a different guise she came there for the first time!

But the knight had dismissed his servants. Half undressed, he stood in painful meditation before a great mirror; the taper burned dimly at his side. Then there came a finger at the door, lightly, lightly tapping. That is how Undine would have tapped, had she pleasantly wished to call him to her. "It is

all nothing but fancy," he said to himself. "I must enter my bridal bed."

"Yes, that you must, but a cold one!" he heard a weeping voice reply outside the room, and in the mirror he saw the door open, slowly, slowly, and the white wandering figure enter and carefully shut the door again behind it. "They have opened the fountain," she said softly, "and now I am here, and you must die."

He felt his heart stop beating, and knew that it was inevitable, yet covered his eyes with his hands, and said:—

"Do not darken the hour of my death with terror. If you bear a horrid countenance behind that veil, then lift it not, and slay me without my having seen you."

"Ah!" replied the wanderer, "will you not look once more upon me? I am as fair as when you found me first upon the borders of the lake."

"Oh! if it might be so," sighed Huldbrand, "and if I might only die upon a kiss of thine!"

"And so you shall, my darling," she said. And

she flung back her veil, and her sweet face smiled out of it in all its heavenly beauty.

Quivering with love and the approach of death, the knight bowed to meet her, she kissed him with a heavenly kiss, but she released him not, she pressed him ever closer and closer to her, and wept as if she would weep away her soul. The tears flooded the eyes of the knight, and in a sweet agony of woe they so whelmed his bosom that at length they bore his breath away, and he sank back a corpse out of those lovely arms on to the cushions of the bed of rest.

“I have wept him to death!” she said to a servant who met her in the antechamber, and through the midst of the terror-stricken retainers she glided slowly out into the fountain.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW THE KNIGHT HULDBRAND WAS BURIED

FATHER HEILMANN arrived at the castle as soon as the death of the Lord of Ringstetten was reported in the neighbourhood, and he made his appearance at the very moment when the monk who had married the luckless pair, overwhelmed with terror and horror, had fled from the gates.

“It is well,” replied Heilmann, when they told him of this fact; “the office now falls on me, and I need no consort.” He thereupon began to bestow his consolations on the widow-bride, however little effect they might have on her essentially worldly mind. The old fisherman took the fate which had befallen his daughter and son-in-law in much better part, grieved to the soul as he was, and while Bertalda

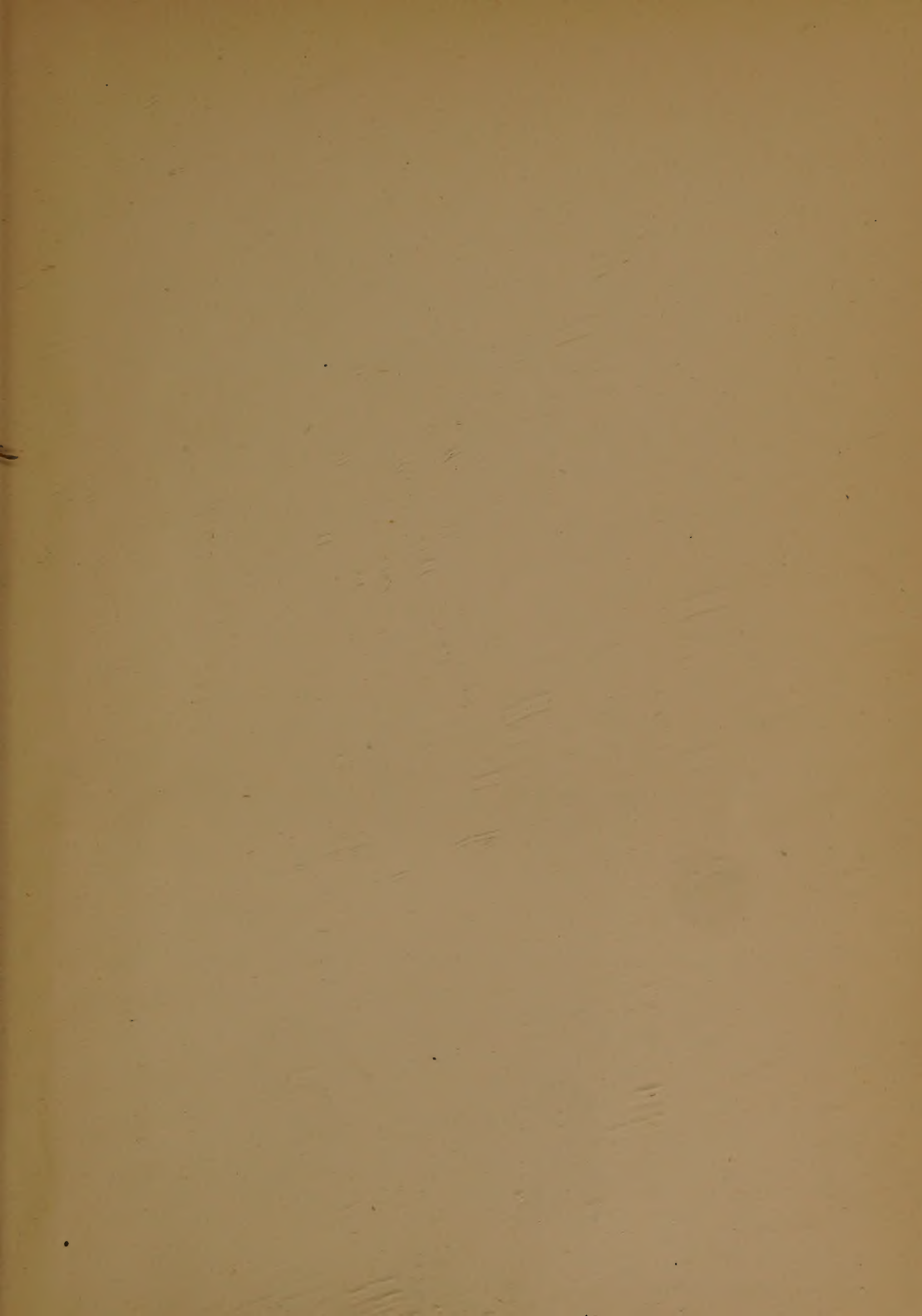
persisted in denouncing Undine as a murderess and a witch, the old man said with resignation, "It could not have turned out otherwise. I see naught in it but God's judgment, and certainly no one could suffer more anguish from the death of Huldbrand than she whose duty it was ordained to execute it, our poor, banished Undine." Thereupon he set about arranging the funeral ceremonies, in due accordance with the rank of the deceased. He was to be buried in a village in whose churchyard stood the graves of all his ancestors, a village which they, as he himself, had honoured with valuable liberties and gifts. Shield and helmet lay already on the coffin, ready to be lowered into the grave, for Lord Huldbrand of Ringstetten had been the last of his race; the mourners started on their melancholy way, singing elegies in the bright, clear weather under the blue of heaven, Heilmann stepped in front with a lofty crucifix, and the inconsolable Bertalda followed, supported by her aged father. Then all were suddenly aware, in the midst of the dark raiment of the women in attendance on the widow, a snow-white figure, closely veiled, and

wringing her hands in the extremity of lamentation. A secret horror seized those by whose side she walked, they drew backward or aside, by this movement still more terrifying others, at whose side the white stranger now appeared, so that agitation and confusion began to disturb the whole funeral procession. Certain soldiers were so courageous as to accost the figure, and to endeavour to thrust her from the train, but she melted under their hands, and was discovered still with slow and solemn steps sweeping onward with the funeral procession. At last, the maid-servants having all slipped out of her path, she found herself close behind Bertalda. But with that her gait became extremely slow, so that the widow was not aware of her presence, and very humbly and modestly the figure proceeded, no longer disturbed, to step on behind her.

This continued until they arrived at the churchyard, and the procession formed a circle around the open grave. Then Bertalda perceived the uninvited guest, and, half in anger, half in terror, she started back, and desired her to quit the knight's place of rest. The veiled figure, however, gently shook her

head, refusing, and raised her hands towards Bertalda as though in humble entreaty ; this deeply moved the widow, and she could not but think how Undine had so kindly desired to present to her the coral necklace on the Danube. But now Father Heilmann gave a glance and commanded silence, that all might join in silent prayer above the corpse, over which a hillock had already begun to rise. Bertalda was silent, sank to her knee ; and then the others knelt, even the gravediggers, whose labour with the shovel was now done. But when they rose to their feet again, the white stranger had vanished ; at the spot where she had knelt there gushed out of the sod a little spring, as bright as silver, that rippled and rippled away until it had almost wholly encircled the hillock of the knight's grave ; then it ran on and flowed into a pool that lay beside the churchyard. In after ages, the dwellers in the village were used to point to this spring, and were confident in the belief that this was poor Undine in her banishment, who had contrived in this way to fold her kind arms for ever about the man she loved.

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